

interzone

SEPTEMBER 2001

NUMBER 171

£3.00

GREGORY BENFORD

ERIC BROWN

LEIGH KENNEDY

JAMES LOVEGROVE

RUARIDH PRINGLE

ZORAN ZIVKOVIC

INTERVIEW WITH

ADAM ROBERTS

NICK LOWE • DAVID LANGFORD • TIM ROBINS



SMALL ADS



2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY: an exhibition of original artwork for Kubrick's cult film and related space memorabilia. 14 November 2001 to 20 January 2002 at Abingdon Museum, The County Hall, Market Place, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3HG. Tel. 01235 523703. The Museum is open daily, 10.30-4.00 pm (closed 24-26 December and 1 January).

AUTHORS WANTED for web-based magazine. Science fiction, horror and fantasy all needed. You could earn up to £150 per story. Visit: www.alternatespecies.com for details.

STORIES WITH A DIFFERENCE — plus adventure, music and animation. Also a chance to buy the "Gray Star" adventure disc with a £2.50 discount when you log on to www.grAystar.co.uk

DREAMBERRY WINE BOOKS. Pre-owned book reallocation consultant. Regular catalogues, 1,200-1,500 items, all SF/F. Plus reviews, loccol. Stamp or SAE to: 233 Maine Road, Manchester M14 7WG.

DREAMBERRY WINE: SF (not Sci-Fi!) mail-order list. Regular catalogues, over 1,500 books, paperback and hardback. No silly prices — or not many, anyway. Stamp/SAE to Dreamberry Wine, 233 Maine Road, Manchester M14 7WG. (Tel. 0161-226 2980.)

ORIGINAL COMEDY SCI-FI — *The Captain Disaster Collection*, BOOKNET's Small Press Book of the Year 2000: "This book is a must for anyone familiar with the cult sci-fi shows." Priced £2.99 UK, £3.49 Europe, £3.99 R.O.V. inc. P&P — cheques/IMOs payable to "David Seaman" at Best Medicine Press, 49 Saunton Avenue, Hayes, Middlesex UB3 5HG. Website: <http://captaindisaster.terrashare.com>

FANTASTIC LITERATURE. Regular free lists of sf, fantasy and horror from 35 The Ramparts, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8PY; tel. 01268-747564; e-mail sgosden@netcomuk.co.uk — or search our entire 12,000 stock on-line at: www.fantasticliterature.com

ALBEDO ONE magazine #23. MICHAEL MOORCOCK interviewed. Fiction, reviews, comment. £25 for best story. £3 or £12 for 4 issues. 2 Post Road, Lusk, Co Dublin, Ireland.

CD-ROM SF ENCYCLOPEDIA. Now available together with David Langford's hugely improved viewer, search and update software (Windows 95/98/NT only). £23.50 or \$35 post free. Viewer without CD-ROM: £11.75 or \$17.50. 94 London Road, Reading, RG1 5AU; ansible@cix.co.uk; www.ansible.demon.co.uk/sfview/

THE BRIAN STABLEFORD WEBSITE contains the latest news, views and a full bibliography. See: <http://freespace.virgin.net/diri.gini/brian.htm>

THE JULES VERNE SOCIETY of Great Britain welcomes fans of the father of science fiction. Details: send s.a.e. to: JVS (GB), 26 Matlock Road, Bloxwich WS3 3QD.

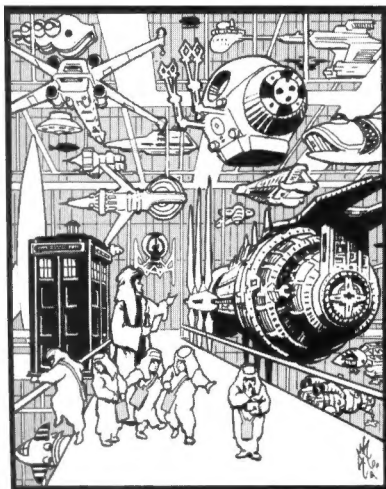
FOR SALE: science fiction, fantasy, horror, mysteries, etc. Free search service. Send wants. No obligation. Also buying. John Schneider, 1500 Main Avenue, Kaukauna, Wisconsin 54130, USA.

INTERZONE BACK ISSUES, many at reduced prices, are now available — along with other sf, fantasy & horror magazines and books — from "The Talking Dead," 12 Rosamund Avenue, Merley, Dorset BH21 1TE, UK (tel.: 01202-849212; e-mail: talking.dead@tesco.net). Wants lists encouraged, catalogues issued regularly. *Always buying.*

CHRIS GILMORE doesn't just review... Have you a manuscript that needs just that little extra polish to be published? I offer honest opinions and expert attention at reasonable rates. Ring (01234-346142) or write: 27 Salisbury St., Bedford MK41 7RE.

BRIGHTON AREA readers of *Interzone* are welcome to join us on Friday nights at The Mitre, a friendly pub on Baker Street (near the Open Market). A few of us meet from 9-11pm, in the smaller of the two rooms, for informal drink and chat. You'll recognize us by the copies of *IZ* or other sf publications lying around — so come along and make yourselves known. (Editors.)

SMALL ADS in *Interzone* reach 10,000 people. If you wish to advertise please send your ad copy, together with payment, to *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. Rates: 25 pence per word, minimum of ten words, discount of 10% for insertions repeated in three issues (VAT is inclusive)



COMING NEXT MONTH

In hand are new stories by our recent poll-winner Barrington J. Bayley — and Chris Beckett, Thomas M. Disch, Alexander Glass, Lisa Tuttle, Zoran Zivkovic and many others. A good selection of those will appear in the October issue of *Interzone* — along with all our usual features and reviews.



Vignettes by SMS

Editor & Publisher
David Pringle

Assistant Editors
Andrew Tidmarsh
Andy Robertson

Graphic Design
and Typesetting
Paul Brazier

Advisory Editors
John Clute
Malcolm Edwards
Judith Hanna
Lee Montgomerie
Simon Ounsley

Subscriptions Secretary
Ann Pringle

Interzone
217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL,
United Kingdom.

Subscriptions, back-issue orders,
general correspondence, books for
review, and enquiries about advertising
should be sent to this address.

Subscriptions:
£34 for one year (12 issues) in the UK.
Cheques or postal orders should be
made payable to *Interzone*. Overseas
subscriptions are £40. Payment may
also be made by MasterCard, Visa or
Eurocard: please send cardholder's
name and address, written in block
letters, with card number, card expiry
date and signature. (Note: overseas
payments will be charged at the £
sterling rate.) Alternatively, American
subscribers may pay by dollar check,
drawn on a U.S. bank, at \$60. (All
copies outside Europe are sent by
accelerated surface mail.).

Lifetime subscriptions:
£340 (UK); £400 (overseas); \$600 (USA).

Back-issues:
The most recent six numbers are
available at £3.50 each in the UK
(£4 each overseas), postage included.
(US dollar price: \$6 accelerated surface
mail.) For all earlier back issues,
enquire of "The Talking Dead"
12 Rosamund Avenue, Merley, Dorset
BH21 1TE, UK (tel.: 01202-849212;
e-mail: talking.dead@tesco.net).

Submissions:
Stories, in the 2,000-6,000 word range,
should be sent singly and each must be
accompanied by a stamped self-
addressed envelope of adequate size.
Persons overseas please send a
disposable manuscript (marked as
such) and two International Reply
Coupons. We are unable to reply to
writers who do not send return postage.
No responsibility can be accepted for
loss or damage to unsolicited material,
howsoever caused. Submissions should
be sent to the Brighton address above.

interzone

science fiction & fantasy

SEPTEMBER 2001

Number 171

CONTENTS

Fiction

THE FRANKENBERG PROCESS <i>Eric Brown</i>	6
WIND ANGELS <i>Leigh Kennedy</i>	17
THE FIRE <i>Zoran Zivkovic</i>	29
THREE GODS <i>Gregory Benford</i>	37
JUNK MALE <i>James Lovegrove</i>	41
MEETING THE RELATIVES <i>Ruaridh Pringle</i>	45

Features

INTERACTION <i>Readers' Letters</i>	4
A WIZARD OF THE VERTICAL <i>Adam Roberts interviewed by Nick Gevers</i>	25
MUTANT POPCORN <i>Film reviews by Nick Lowe</i>	34
ANSIBLE LINK <i>News by David Langford</i>	52
REPORT FROM FARPOINT <i>Media Commentary by Tim Robins</i>	53
BOOK REVIEWS <i>Nick Gevers, Iain Emsley, Tim Robins and Nigel Brown</i>	58

Cover by Roy Virgo

Published monthly. All material is © *Interzone*, 2001, on behalf of the various contributors

ISSN 0264-3596

Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

Trade distribution: Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd.,
Unit 7, Rother Ironworks, Fishmarket Road, Rye,
East Sussex TN31 7LR (tel. 01797 225229).

Bookshop distribution: Central Books,
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN (tel. 020 8986 4854).



A Non-Grumble – in fact, a Rave

Dear Editors:

I have been close to writing on three previous occasions; in criticism of the alternate-history issue (#155), in complaint about the amount of space and number of issues permitted to Richard Calder, and, most recently, in response to Evelyn Lewes's flawed and poorly-written media commentary.

I am glad that I held my pen (or should that be fingertips, given that this is via e-mail?) and that I can instead write a first letter with an overwhelmingly positive tone. The reason for this rosy glow? Ian R MacLeod. Mr MacLeod was not a writer with whom I was familiar at all, perhaps unsurprisingly given his penchant for being published in American magazines, and working almost solely in the short-story idiom. With the wonderful "Isabel of the Fall" (*Interzone* 169) he manages to simultaneously create a stunning backdrop, a tragic love story, two vicious tortures observed without the gratuitous relish that many others might have displayed, and an amazing sense of hope, surely much out of vogue in times when most writers, especially British authors, seem to spin their tales whilst huddled in the cloak of cynicism. I look forward to tracking down the books mentioned in the most helpful bibliography, and hope to see Mr MacLeod grace your pages again soon.

I must close with the observation that I was amazed the name of Cordwainer Smith did not appear in the interview following "Isabel." With that piece's folk/fairy tale structure, the Smith-like title of another of MacLeod's pieces, "Nina-with-the-Sky-in-Her-Hair," and especially the uncanny resemblances in their sensibilities, I felt sure Smith had to have had some influence.

Lee Tchami

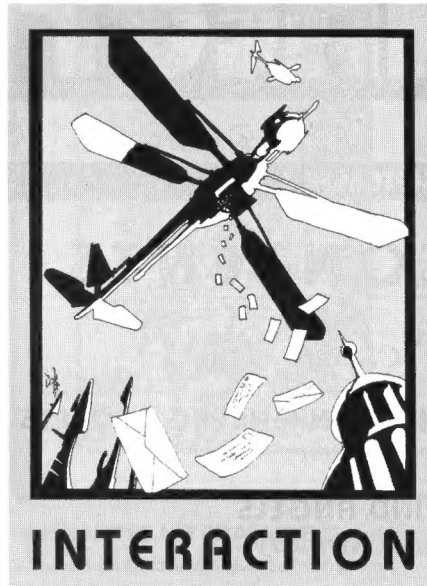
Craigdon, Scotland

"I'm Obsessed and It's All Your Fault!"

Dear Editors:

I have recently renewed my subscription for a third six-month period. This has posed serious problems.

When I started, I was nearing the end of a project to read all of Ballard's works, and I thought it would be interesting to see what else is out there. Shortly after receiving my first few issues, I had a chance to travel in England. Here I was able to pick up in second-hand bookstores old *Interzone*



collections, books by *Interzone*-recommended authors and even an old *New Worlds* anthology. I read *New Worlds* 1, with stories by Ballard, Disch, Bailey and Sladek, at the Royal Worcester museum while my wife was buying tea-pots, and on the plane home.

When I got back, there were two issues of *Interzone* waiting for me. I have never gotten caught up. Despite my greatest resolve, I have gotten even further behind. Meanwhile, I have come close to finishing Ballard (after some problems with *High-Rise*) and have read novels by Blish, M. John Harrison, Aldiss, Spinrad, and Disch. But don't forget, I came new to science fiction three years ago. So I have another project of reading the classics, Zamyatin, Harness, Capek, Van Vogt, Stapledon, etc. But there is also the cyberpunk tradition – and being Canadian, I couldn't overlook William Gibson.

Then I came across Richard Calder. The first story I read had too much pseudo-medieval talk about churls, knaves, and wenches, and kind of left me cold. But then "The Lady of the Carnelias" (*IZ* 161) and "Roach Motel" (*IZ* 166) blew my socks off. Now I'm reading *Dead Girls* and can't put it down.

I don't know whether to thank you or curse you. It's a good thing I've retired. There are so many treasures I want to get into! The pace of obsession is accelerating. I have lists of lists, including your *SF: The 100 Best Novels*. The *Interzone* book reviews put me over the edge. When will I ever get to them?

How do other addicts deal with this? So far the best I can do is to limit

Letters for publication should be e-mailed to interzone@cix.co.uk – or sent by conventional post to our editorial address (shown on the contents page). Please note that we reserve the right to shorten letters.

myself mostly to novels, and to have only three or four of varying styles going at once. I've tried restricting myself to certain styles of writing, but reading the stories and reviews in *Interzone* blows this away. Is there some kind of strategy of discipline or focus other readers use?

Any suggestions you can offer will be appreciated.

Joe Parchelo

Ottawa, Canada

jkparche@home.com

Editor: We apologize for inflicting such a "problem" on you, Mr Parchelo. Can any other readers offer advice?

Puzzlement

Dear Editors:

I very much enjoyed your June issue (#168), although I still find that it would be nice if the cover art could relate to one of the stories in the magazine, rather than being another generic Roy Virgo. I very much liked Nigel Brown's "Rare as a Rocket"; and Dominic Green's "Grass," albeit rather implausible, was one of the most imaginative "Neanderthal" pieces that I have read.

By far the most entertaining piece was Paul Di Filippo's "Babylon Sisters." However, there was something odd about the story – something so odd that it made me write this letter. In section 2 (page 7) the two sisters "learn to read" in order to understand the protagonist as he writes down their past story together, but in section 5 (which describes what happened "before" the previous scene) one of the sisters can already read – in fact she has read "a whole book about Jesus," and goes on to recite aloud the Book of Revelations! Have I missed something?

Another oddity is that occasionally Sandy uses the third person to talk about himself – on p15, "I was about to hail the returned sister when Judy clamped a hand over his mouth." This should really have been "my mouth." Again, is Paul Di Filippo trying to say something that has escaped me? Or was perhaps this story first written in the third person and later revised into the current version?

Joan Montserrat

London N4

Paul Di Filippo replies: I was gratified to get your thoughtful and complimentary letter on my story "Babylon Sisters." Many thanks for your insights.

1) First, let me confess to being a lousy proofreader. The story indeed began life as a third-person narrative. During many revisions into the first-person, I thought I had cleared up all inconsistencies. Obviously not. So,

nothing tricky intended there!

2) As for the Sisters learning to read, you'll note that the chronologically first mention of it (not the textual first mention of it), when Jezzie, I think, claims to "read" the Bible in one gulp, to her at that point reading just means downloading any one text via TAP. In the second reference (first textual occurrence), when both Sisters learn to read, they are talking about downloading not the sense of any one text but rather the protocols for deciphering all text. Unfortunately, I did not make a clear enough distinction between these two modes, but that's what I had in mind.

The Human Form Divine

Dear Editors:

I am writing in response to the unfair criticism from Catherine Pacey in *Interzone* 169. Catherine has incorrectly pointed out that it is always "scantly-clad women, and never scantly-clad men" in her reference to the cover art of *IZ* 166.

The depiction of the human form in fantastic situations has enjoyed a rich history in sf art. The dramatic cover paintings by artists Walter Popp and Earle K. Bergey in the 1950s; James E. Bama's incomparable paintings for the Doc Savage paperbacks in the '60s; Frank Frazetta's heroic men and women... Boris Vallejo and Julie Bell's contemporary visions of heroic fantasy can hardly be described as "top-shelf" material. These artists are but a few who have portrayed the human form, of both men and women, in various states of undress, to the benefit of the genre.

The popularity of Seven of Nine

from the current *Star Trek: Voyager* series suggests to me that beautiful people are not only desirable in sf but are an essential ingredient.

There is no danger of subverting the genre.

Instead it is political correctness gone mad that threatens to rip the heart out of the genre, and it is hysterical over-reaction by people who clearly find the human form in its natural state offensive which is the real danger to artistic expression in the genre today.

Interzone is an excellent publication which serves as a platform for the expression of its contributors both in sf literature and art. Long may it continue to do so.

Darren Winter

darren@powerlines.co.uk

A Tiny Correction

Dear Editors:

These days, sadly, due to pressure of work and lack of time, copies of *Interzone* tend to stack up in our house like jets in the skies above Heathrow. The other day I was looking through *IZ* no. 165. I very much enjoyed Simon Ings's story, "Myxomatosis," which reads like the kind of story the magazine used to publish regularly in the early 1980s, the kind of story that first turned me on to *Interzone*.

I also appreciated Matt Colborn's review of *The Time Out Book of London Short Stories Volume 2*, which I edited, but I must, since *Interzone* is a journal of record, make one tiny correction. Matt attributes to Paul J. McAuley a story about London as an "entropic landscape, where personal

relationships are decaying at the rate of the metal." In fact, the story he is thinking of is Christopher Kenworthy's "Waste Ground." McAuley's contribution was "Bone Orchards," which is now reprinted in the *Mammoth Book of Best New Horror 12* (along with Iain Sinclair's story, "The Keeper of the Rothenstein Tomb") edited by Stephen Jones.

Nicholas Royle

nick@kalbarri.demon.co.uk

<http://www.sonnet.co.uk/em/nicholasroyle/>

Dear Editors:

I've been reading through a rather large pile of old *Interzone* issues I picked up recently. Found a lot of old Greg Egan, Paul McAuley and Brian Stableford stories that aren't in their respective collections. But I must say, the entire magazine is always worth reading from cover to cover, whatever particular thing I picked it up for. First-class reviews and all the rest as well (and Langford's "Ansible Link" of course!)

Peter Hollo

raven@fourplay.com.au

<http://www.fourplay.com.au/blog/>

Subscription Copy Missing!

Dear Editors:

I am missing my subscription copy of *Interzone* 166. It would appear I am a victim of the Anti-Science Fiction fascists. I managed to spot issue 168 as it came in, so I followed it carefully, and to my horror discovered that the girl who deals with the office post took a brief look at it and tossed it into the bin. I managed to salvage this copy and explain that this is probably the most important piece of post she deals with, and to never throw it out again. It therefore seems likely that issue 166 went the way of the trash compactor. I am sure this will bring on nightmares for years, and I shall be keeping a very close eye on the office post in future. So it only remains for me to enquire about ordering a replacement copy to be sent here to the States.

Yours, wishing a pox on all unenlightened types...

Tony Lowe

tony.lowe@wktest.com

Editor: We have sent Tony Lowe a replacement copy of issue 166. His anecdote just goes to show the dangers of having subscription copies sent to the workplace.

Readers' Letters continue on page 56

Young lions of British science fiction: left to right, Roger Levy, Adam Roberts, James Lovegrove and James Barclay at the launch party for James Barclay's and Adam Roberts' new books



THE FRANKENBERG PROCESS



O N E

The Director was still being interviewed by Security, so Freeman was called on to ascend to the control room and oversee the extraction process.

It was a routine sub-mantle sampling. Freeman ensconced himself in the wrap-around console and monitored the readouts. From time to time, white-coated techs hurried across the chamber with softscreens for him to check and initial.

The view through the semi-circular sweep of glass showed a steel-clad pit, a great inverted cone in the hillside, with the extraction apparatus suspended above it like some immense, futuristic spaceship coming in to land.

Spaceship, he thought to himself, smiling: what a quaint notion.

His mind was on other things beside the extraction. A rumour

had spread through the plant that morning: Director Ruskin was under suspicion of selling magma plant secrets to the Indians. Freeman found it hard to believe. Ruskin had been seen in the city's Shah Jehan Tandoori last week, where, the story had it, he'd passed secrets to an Indian official over spiced ginger tea and barfi.

Freeman wound down the extraction process, sat back and stared out beyond the machinery to the countryside rolling away to the horizon. The contrast between the stark silver geometry of the drill-head and the unspoilt rural beauty could not be more marked. England had prospered under the Western Alliance for the past 30 years; indeed, the West had never known such times. Tel-Mass had brought that about, aided by the magma extraction process taking place on Earth and the colony planets. How could India and the Asian bloc compete with the Alliance? The Indians still explored the Out-there with slower-than-light ion-driven starships, rendered obsolete with the advent of TelMass.

So why would anyone of the West even consider dealing with the East?

Freeman stirred, uncomfortable. From time to time a tiny, insidious voice whispered the answer, and he tried not to listen.

His com chimed. The screen, set into the arm of his chair, flared. He was surprised to see the bloated, over-indulged face of General Carstairs staring out at him. The Government man wore a black, side-fastening suit. Freeman was struck by the thought that, so dressed, out of uniform, the General was hiding something.

"Freeman? If you'd care to meet me in the green office immediately."

Freeman nodded. "I'm on my way."

He left the operation's room and paced the long, curving corridor around the plant to the admin centre.

General Carstairs sat behind an oval silver desk. Overweight and old-fashioned, the military man struck Freeman as out of place in Director Ruskin's swivel chair.

Ominous, he thought.

"Take a seat," Carstairs said.

Only as he sat down did Freeman see, seated in the corner of the room, a casually-dressed civil servant he recognized from the news broadcasts: Carstairs' aide-de-camp, Richards.

The General nodded towards a com-screen on the desk. Freeman made out lines of text.

"I've been assessing your records, Freeman. I'm impressed. Five years of exemplary duty under Ruskin. You've learned a lot. Whenever you filled in for him, you did well."

He was happy with his post of assistant Director. He had never hankered after promotion, and everything that would entail...

He knew what was coming. And he knew, too, that the rumours he'd heard that morning had been far from groundless.

Carstairs said, "I want you to consider promotion. Directorship of the plant. Starting next week. Of course, a translation to Beta Hydri 5 would be a concomitant. We

know you must have considered the likelihood that one day... Even so, I'll give you until tomorrow to think about it, talk it over with your wife. However – " and here Carstairs fixed him with an unflinching gaze " – acceptance of the promotion would be highly advisable. Any questions?"

He shook his head, a feeling very much like sickness in his stomach. "None."

For the first time, Richards spoke. "Very good, Mr Freeman. I advise you to download a few philosophical tracts, if you haven't already done so. Frankenberg's treatise on the process might help you get your head around the finer points of the ethics."

Freeman nodded "I'll do that."

General Carstairs killed his desk-com. "Very well, that will be all. I'll see you here at noon tomorrow."

Freeman stood, nodded to the General, and left the room.

In a daze of disbelief he took the escalator to the concourse, and only as he alighted did he notice the crowd of admin workers gathered on the piazza. They were staring across the sunlit square at the sleek blue form of a security van parked outside the Director's office.

As if on cue, two guards emerged through the double doors. Between them, attempting to maintain some semblance of dignity, strode Director Ruskin. He stared straight ahead, his expression fixed, his complexion ashen.

Freeman felt his stomach turn.

Soon, a news report would announce the accidental death of Director Ruskin. His funeral would be attended by close family only, and given minimal coverage. Not long after that, all record of the Director's ever being a part of the Western Alliance's extensive infrastructure would be expunged from the record books.

Soon, Director Benjamin Ruskin would never have existed.

A salutary warning, Freeman thought. He could not suppress, however, the sickening sensation that curdled in his gut as Ruskin was manhandled into the back of the security van and driven away at speed.

As he sat back and slipped the auto into self-drive, Freeman considered the implications of the promotion offer.

Parkland sped by. Cloudless sky. The occasional hamlet came and went in a flash of designer-quaint terracotta tiles and topiary. Freeman closed his eyes.

The opportunity of a new start. The thought beguiled, and at the same time unnerved him. He would have to read Frankenberg, as Richards had suggested. He had never been able to fully understand the philosophical intricacies of the Process.

He reached out and activated his com. He entered Hansen's code. The screen set into the dash flared, and seconds later Doug Hansen was smiling out at him. "Joe. It's been too long."

"Busy, Doug. You wouldn't believe it. You free?"

"Just finished the afternoon shift. Why not come over? I'll be in the office."

The TelMass station soared high above the vales of rural Warwickshire in a classical series of scimitar

sweeps. Atop the tripod, on the deck of the derrick itself, the control rooms were silhouetted against the afternoon sunlight like the superstructure of a battleship.

Freeman rode the elevator up the side of the station and walked down carpeted corridors to the manager's office overlooking the translation pad.

Doug had coffee brewed and poured. They sat on leather recliners before the floor-to-ceiling viewscreen and watched a team of technicians inspect the wiring beneath the deck plates.

"What do you fear?" Doug asked him, once Freeman had explained the situation. Trust Doug to cut to the quick!

"I don't know. I fear..." He sipped his coffee. "I fear staying here, I fear going."

Doug smiled. "Then you've nothing to fear," he said.

Doug Hansen had gone to Beta Hydri six months ago. Freeman was hoping for more than just platitudes from the man.

"What does it feel like?"

"Like nothing at all happened," the TelMass manager said. "Nothing at all. But, I admit, it is strange to think that out there..."

He stopped and stared at Freeman. "How is it between you and Emma?"

Freeman shrugged. He kept his gaze on the deck. "You know, when you love someone who doesn't love you... sometimes I don't know what I feel. For so long I've told myself that I do love her, hoping that some day she might change, say she loves me." He shook his head. "I must admit, I've been thinking about a new start, a new life. I'd miss her, but how can you keep on loving someone who doesn't love you?"

Doug shook his head. In his eyes, Freeman could see an infinite sympathy. Doug's own marriage was damned near perfect.

"Joe, if I'm right, then Carstairs won't take no for an answer."

"I could refuse, but I dread the consequences." He saw, in his mind's eye, the image of Ruskin being taken away by the security guards.

"Then you can't refuse, Joe. Go."

Freeman shook his head, near despair. "But what will it be like, Doug, to leave behind all I know, to start again on an alien world, a new life, with no going back...?"

"Read your Frankenberg," Doug said, gently. He looked at his watch. "Dammit. I said I'd meet Caroline at five. Look, let's meet up tomorrow, okay? How about dinner at the Barn? Around six?"

They took the elevator to the parking lot, and Freeman watched the TelMass manager climb into his auto and speed onto the sliproad.

How can one be true to oneself under a totalitarian regime, he wondered?

There is no choice, when all free choice has been taken away by the dictates of central government. One cannot follow one's heart, because one's head knows full well the consequences. One is forced into doing what one is ordered to do – because to do otherwise would be con-

sidered insubordinate, and duly punished.

We are pawns, Freeman thought. Pawns pampered and cosseted, on a board of the finest mahogany, but pawns nonetheless.

We can but march relentlessly onward...

He'd heard that things were different in India and the other states of the East. Did Ruskin know something? Was that why he had taken the ultimate risk, and paid the price?

His auto drew into the drive of his villa. Emma would be home from school. How would she take what he had to tell her?

He felt an immense weariness settle over him as he climbed the steps and entered the lounge.

"You're late."

"I had to go over see Doug."

"Dinner's ready."

He followed her into the dining room.

She was small, slim, dark-haired, more attractive now in her late 30s than when he had met her five years ago.

She'd been married before and had a son, who split the week between Emma and her ex-husband in Warwick. Something about the fact that she was a mother – the centred, caring air it gave her – had immediately attracted Freeman. He had loved her from the outset, while over the years she had showed him no more, it seemed, than grudging affection.

They ate in near-silence, Freeman preoccupied with his thoughts.

Over coffee, she watched him above the rim of her cup. "What is it, Joe?"

He hesitated, wondering how she might take it. "I've been offered promotion."

Her eyes widened. "The Directorship? What happened to Ruskin? I thought he was there for life?"

He shook his head, shrugged, too sickened by what Ruskin had done to elucidate. "He was sacked. I don't know why."

She lowered her cup, staring at him. "Does it mean you'll be going off-planet?"

He nodded. "Beta Hydri 5."

Her jaw set as she tried to control her reaction. "I see. Of course, you could always refuse –"

"You don't understand, Emma. Refusal would be impossible. I'd be demoted, at least."

Her gaze was hard. "How do you think you'll manage? Alone, I mean. Without me?"

He shrugged. He dropped his gaze and let out a long sigh. "Emma, if our marriage was perfect... If you loved me, showed me affection from time to time –"

"You're such a romantic fool."

"I don't think it's too much to ask."

She pushed her cup aside, angry. "Your boss shouts, and you jump through the hoops."

"For God's sake, it isn't as if you'll be here alone."

"But you'll be there, Joe, without me."

He stared at her.

That was what this was about. She could not bear to think that he could live without her.

"I've had five years of loving you and getting damn all

back," he said. "You don't know what that does to someone."

He thought of an analogy. It was like working for the Government, working for a totalitarian regime, believing in it, until, finally, experience taught you that your belief was founded on nothing, and turned sour.

How could he tell her that?

"I thought you were satisfied with what we had," she began.

He knew that it would escalate into a shouting match, but he was saved by the chime of the house-com.

Emma jumped up and padded into the lounge. He heard her accept the call, a few indistinct words of the caller, and then his wife's strangled gasp, "Oh, my God!" followed by, "Joe... Joe!"

His stomach turning, he pushed himself from the table and almost ran into the lounge. Emma was kneeling on the floor, staring at the screen.

A face stared out, a woman's face made ugly by tears.

Caroline Hansen, Doug's wife.

Emma looked up at him, shaking her head. "It's Doug," she said. "Doug's dead. A road accident. Coming home. His auto-com malfunctioned and he ran into the back of a container-craft."

Freeman stared at Caroline. "We'll be right over, okay? We're on our way."

Doug and Caroline Hansen lived on a secure estate of mansion houses on the outskirts of Warwick. A militia van was parked outside the house. Two black-uniformed civil guards stood to attention beside the front door.

Freeman showed his ID card and pushed his way into the house.

Caroline sat on the settee, sobbing into a tissue. A policewoman sat beside her. When Emma ran to Caroline and took her in her arms, the policewoman stood and tactfully left the room.

While the women embraced, Freeman found himself looking around the room. Pictures of Doug and Caroline adorned the walls. The perfect couple. Freeman had never entered the lounge in the past without feeling a stab of involuntary jealousy at the good fortune of his friend.

He went in search of Scotch and found a half bottle behind the bar in the corner.

He poured three stiff measures. Emma forced the drink to Caroline's lips, and Freeman moved to the French window and stared out.

The sun was setting, reflecting off the lake that backed onto the mansions. A flight of mallard rose in a perfectly co-ordinated skein from the surface of the water, as if startled by the grieving woman's sobs.

Doug Hansen was an important man. A very important man. The government could not do without a Tel-Mass manager of his calibre.

He considered the code of ethics laid down by Frankenberg in his writings. The scientist had suggested that a star-traveller should never return, for obvious reasons.

But, in the case of Doug Hansen, wouldn't it be different?

He wondered if such a case had occurred before in the five years since the initiation of TelMass travel.

He glanced back at the sobbing woman and cleared his throat. "Has General Carstairs been informed?"

Emma shot him a glance that said eloquently, *Not now, Joe!*

Caroline sniffed, shook her head. "The militia, they... they suggested he should be told. He's on his way over. To be honest, I don't really feel up to... If you could put him off."

Emma said, "Of course." She looked up at Freeman. "We'll take you back with us, Carrie."

Freeman heard a car draw up outside. He moved from the lounge, past the policewoman in the hall. When he opened the front door, General Carstairs and the ever-present Richards were striding up the path.

The general looked surprised. "Freeman?"

"My wife and I are friends of Doug and Caroline," he explained.

He showed the two men into the lounge.

Emma looked up. "Joe, Caroline said -"

Freeman exchanged a look with Carstairs, who nodded.

"General Carstairs would like a little time alone with Caroline, Emma," he said, and gestured his wife from the room.

She followed him into the adjacent kitchen. "At a time like this," she began as soon as they were out of earshot, "the last thing Carrie wants is the commiseration of some stuffed-shirt like..." She gestured towards the lounge.

Freeman ignored her. He stood by the window and stared out. The ducks were sweeping over the stand of elm on the far side of the lake.

He wondered at the type of wildlife he might find on Beta Hydri 5. He had never bothered to access the documentaries about the planet. Perhaps, now, he would have to do a little research.

"Anyway," Emma was saying, "what does General whatever-his-name want with her? She needs to be with friends."

Five minutes later Freeman heard the sound of footsteps in the hall. The General and his aide were leaving.

Emma hurried into the lounge; Freeman followed.

Caroline was sitting upright on the sofa, slowly shaking her head as if in amazement. She smiled, radiantly, as Emma crossed the room and took her hand.

Freeman watched from the door.

"He's... he's coming back," Caroline managed. "General Carstairs said that rules are made to be broken. Can you believe that? Doug is coming back from Beta Hydri!"

That night, Freeman sat with a beer on the verandah of his villa and stared up at the mass of stars stretching across the heavens.

He pulled the softscreen onto his lap and called up the Frankenberg file. He read for 15 minutes, but the convolutions of the complex logic defeated him.

He could understand the science behind the Frankenberg Process, but it was the idea underpinning the effect that had always left him baffled. Philosophers of every

hue had tried to resolve the paradox, but never to his satisfaction. He supposed it would be a case of having to undergo the process himself, but even then he failed to see how he might come to understand what had eluded him for so long.

He accepted General Carstairs' offer, of course, and the date of his departure was set for June 2nd, coincidentally the day of Doug Hansen's return from Beta Hydri 5.

On the evening of the 1st, he dined with Emma as if nothing untoward was about to take place. That night, in bed, she relented to his advances and allowed him to make love to her. It was like all the other occasions – a pleasure soon over, he inhibited in his passion by her evident reluctance to allow herself to let go, to give herself fully, to experience the pleasure that might have been possible.

In the morning she followed him out to the auto. He paused before slipping into the front seat.

"Goodbye," he said, meeting her gaze and attempting to read the emotions behind her eyes.

She reached out and touched his cheek. "Bye, Joe," she whispered.

"See you tonight," he said.

She stared at him. "Will you?" she asked.

He drove away without a backward glance.

Freeman was strapped into the stasis frame on the deck of the TelMass derrick. He tensed as the countdown began. The medics had talked him through the process, explained some of the sensations he could be expected to undergo. He had read his Frankenberg over the course of the last few days. He knew full well what to expect.

But the theory could in no way prepare him for the fact.

"Three... two... one... zero!"

The word exploded in his head, along with the pain.

The pain... why hadn't they mentioned the pain? They had, of course – the medics had told him that he would experience a momentary burn as his physical self was shredded molecule by molecule and transmitted.

But no words could ready him for the absolute and exquisite agony that seemed to stretch for an eternity as he hung in the frame, head flung back, mouth torn open in a scream that issued from the depths of his very soul.

And then it was over.

Oh, blessed cessation of all that was unholy.

A calm descended over his body, a balm. He was whole again, and without pain, and he felt cleansed, and made anew.

He was overcome with a sudden, insatiable curiosity. Where was he? He opened his eyes – and made out the TelMass derrick, the smiling faces of the technicians, and beyond them the rolling green hills of his beloved Warwickshire countryside.

Where was he? Where had he expected to be? He had known, all along, what to expect.

The Frankenberg Process.

He was examined by the medics, passed fit, and allowed home for the rest of the day before he took up the post of Director at the magma plant.

He left the TelMass station and drove home to Emma.

TWO

"Three... two... one... zero!"

The pain... why hadn't they mentioned the pain?

He hung in the frame, head flung back, and screamed out loud.

And then it was over.

A calm descended. He was whole again, and without pain. He felt cleansed, made anew.

He was overcome with a sudden, insatiable curiosity. Where was he? He opened his eyes – and made out the TelMass derrick, the smiling faces of technicians... but technicians new to him. Strangers.

He looked beyond the derrick, and saw the alien landscape of Beta Hydri 5.

Where was he? Where had he expected to be? On beta Hydri 5, of course. He had known, all along, what to expect.

The Frankenberg Process.

The medics unfastened him from the stasis frame and led him across the deck to the recovery lounge. He stared about, in wonder, at the strange alien world that encroached on every side.

Would he ever become accustomed to so bizarre an environment?

He looked up, into the heavens, at the unfamiliar constellations in the dark sky overhead.

Somewhere out there, he knew, was Earth, and upon the Earth, as if nothing at all had happened, was one Joseph Freeman. But who was the copy, he asked himself, and who the original?

"Joe! Joe – it's great to see you!" He looked up. A familiar figure entered the room and hurried across to him, hand outstretched in greeting.

"Heard you were translating, Joe," Doug Hansen said. "Come on, I'll show you to your dome, give you a guided tour..."

They took a hanging mono-train to the residential domes, and as Freeman sat and watched the alien world speed by outside, he wondered what he was doing here.

He recalled the literature he'd read about the planet. Beta Hydri 5 – or Brightwell, named after the scientist who discovered it – was a jungle world. The colonists dwelled in a clearing filled with an agglomeration of domes like massed soap bubbles. The TelMass station occupied another clearing a kilometre away, linked by a mono-rail, and in the same clearing was the magma plant.

The trees were far taller than any variety found on Earth, and possessed great leaves which sprouted directly from their boles, confounding Freeman's image of what a tree should be. And they were blue, or seemed to be in the twilight. From time to time deep booming sounds interrupted the smooth electric humming of the train. Doug explained that this was the mating call of the planet's dominant primate analogue.

Before he stepped from the carriage, Freeman pulled on the gloves Doug had given him, along with the face-mask.

The air was heavy, laden with rank, rotting scents. There was oxygen in the atmosphere, but not sufficient to allow the colonists to go without the masks, which both supplied clean air and filtered out virulent spores harmful to the respiratory system.

Freeman followed Doug from the rail terminus along a suspended catwalk through the jungle to his dome.

His new home was luxurious: a spacious lounge in the upper hemisphere, a bedroom and kitchen on the lower floor. At least the Alliance had spared no expense with accommodation, to compensate for the hostility of the planet beyond the wall of the dome.

Doug poured two drinks from a central bar and strode to the transparent membrane, staring out.

Freeman sat on a lounge with his brandy, still trying to come to terms with the fact of his translation.

Doug was leaner than when he had last seen him, a week ago on Earth. Of course, this was a different Doug to the one he'd known then. Or was it? No, it was the same Doug, but a different version. To think, just four days ago he'd attended Doug Hansen's funeral in Warwick.

He raised his hand and stared at it.

Doug turned from the wall, saw him and smiled.

"I know. Takes some getting used to."

"Who's the copy, Doug? I mean? Is the Freeman back on Earth the original?"

Doug was shaking his head. "Haven't you read your Frankenberg? The dualist concept of copy and original breaks down in the process of translation. The subject is split, is the best way of describing it, and one remains on Earth while the other is flung... wherever."

Freeman took a shot of brandy. "How did you feel about going back, Doug, when you found out about the accident?"

"The Governor broke the news. He explained the situation, said they needed me back in Warwick. The thing was, I'd always missed Caroline and Earth. The pain at times was unbearable. I was excited by the prospect of returning to Caroline – of, from her point of view, returning from the dead."

"Even though you knew that another... another *you*... would remain here?"

"That's the paradox that even Frankenberg could never resolve, Joe." He smiled. "It's enough to know that I'm back on Earth, with Caroline. That she's not alone."

"But it can't ease the pain you must be experiencing now?"

Doug raised his glass. "We all make sacrifices, Joe. And what better sacrifices can one make than for the Alliance?"

Freeman stared into his drink, nodded finally.

He recalled Ruskin. "What happened to the Director, here?"

"Ruskin was removed from his post three days ago. I've only heard rumours from Earth. I was hoping you could fill me in."

"I heard he was selling magma plant secrets to the Indians. Apparently he was recruited just three months ago. Before that, he was a loyal Alliance man. It seems

unfair that –"

"Unfair?"

Freeman looked up at Doug, standing tall and four-square, glass in hand, beneath the curving wall of the dome.

"Ruskin came to Brightwell a year ago," Freeman said. "The Ruskin, here, is innocent of any crimes that the Ruskin on Earth committed. It seems harsh that he should pay for the sins of his Earth version."

Doug was shaking his head. "What you must remember, Joe, is that the Ruskin here can no longer be trusted. He's predisposed to treachery, by the very actions of his Earthbound-split."

"What happened to him? He wasn't –?"

Doug shook his head. "No. No, he was given some menial administrative post on the other side of the planet, well out of harm's way."

He moved to the bar and refilled the glasses. "Fill me in on Earth, Joe," he said. "How's Emma? How was Caroline the last time you saw her?"

They talked long into the night, as three huge moons climbed into the sky and illuminated the dome like searchlights.

Freeman took up his post at the magma plant two days later.

Brightwell was a young planet, its magma reserves relatively close to the surface. The process of extraction was much easier than the same process on Earth, and the yield of energy far greater. At noon every day, the sky above the TelMass derrick was illuminated by a bolt of pure energy as it was beamed directly to Earth.

He socialized with Doug and his colleagues at the magma plant. The colony on Brightwell numbered some 2,000 individuals, equivalent to the population of a small town on Earth. There were a few bars, a holovision cinema, a sports complex.

From time to time Freeman took tours, in a sealed flier, to view the many wonders of the alien world, but always he returned to the safe familiarity of his dome with a feeling of relief.

He had been on Brightwell for a month when he realized that, not only did he miss Earth, but it was a nostalgia that would not be easily assuaged. There was no way that he might come to view this planet as home. It was too hostile and alien to senses and perceptions conditioned by almost 40 years on Earth. There was nothing at all familiar about Brightwell. Even its name was a misnomer. The nights were long, the days short – six hours – and the quality of light during the day not bright at all, but aqueous. The trees bore no resemblance to trees on Earth, nor the wildlife – the specimens he'd come across were vicious, fanged things, like beasts from some nightmare fable. Even the flowers were spined and sickly-hued.

He missed the perfection of the sedate Warwickshire countryside. He wanted to step from the claustrophobic confines of the domes into fresh, clean air, without the encumbrance of face-masks or gloves. He missed the green hills and the blue skies of Earth, and the sense of history, the architecture that linked one subliminally with the past, that gave one a sense of connectedness he

had altogether taken for granted. You only appreciate, he realized, what you have lost.

But most of all he missed Emma.

He missed the simple fact of her familiar humanity, the predictability of her ways. She was a good person, caring and humane. She might not have loved him – but she had felt some form of affection for him. And, anyway, what was love but a variable term applied to a concept that no one person could define absolutely?

As the weeks passed, he spent long hours after work alone in his dome, considering Emma and his lost life on Earth.

His job at the magma plant soon palled. The same work on Earth was varied and often difficult; here, the process of extraction was child's play. He could delegate many of his duties, and when he was in the control room he often found his attention drifting.

He threw himself into the round of parties and social events with which the colonists attempted to amuse themselves. There was a *soirée* of some type or another every night, with imported spirits and locally fermented stuff in plentiful supply.

He met a number of single and attractive women, but the thought of initiating a relationship did not appeal. The image of Emma always intruded, reminding him of what he had left behind.

After a while, he discovered that there were others beside himself who were less than enamoured by life on Beta Hydri 5. Of course, on the surface, all appeared as it should: an industrious, loyal colony working hard for the betterment of the Alliance. But there was a constant sense of despair in the air: the colonists had the aspect of survivors of some apocalyptic accident, hanging on in desperation. Late at night, the parties winding down and alcohol having worked to loosen inhibitions, true feelings and sentiments were prone to make themselves known.

At one such party, in a dome by the edge of the clearing, he sat in a sunken sofa bunker with a woman in her 20s and finished off a bottle of gin.

He was aware of someone seated cross-legged on the floor, level with his head. It was Doug.

Freeman gestured drunkenly. "Doug, Doug, my good friend, Doug. Come and meet..." He peered at the woman. "What's your name?"

She smiled. "Susanna."

"Come and meet Susanna. She was saying – saying how she hated this hell-hole, Doug. I mean. Look at it!" He gestured through the wall of the dome at the monstrous forms of the bloated trees lowering over the settlement.

Doug slipped into the bunker. He sat, legs outstretched, and regarded the glass balanced on his stomach.

"Actually, I didn't say hell-hole," Susanna said.

"But you meant it!" Freeman cried.

She laughed. "There are worse places, so I've heard. Groombridge 7 – what's it called? Can't remember. Anyway, it's supposed to be the pits."

He wondered if Susanna had changed the subject because she did not want to be seen to be criticizing the Alliance.

He raised his glass. "If it's worse than this purgatory,

then it must be bad."

Doug clapped a hand on his shoulder. "If you don't like it, why don't you request a move?"

A move? He'd had no idea that, having undergone one translation, another was possible. "A move? Request a move?" He hiccuped. "They'd allow that?"

Doug nodded. "So long as you've done a year here, and of course the move must be onward, to another colony world. You can't go back to Earth."

Freeman shook his head. "You can't go back to Earth..." he echoed.

"Of course not," Susanna said, touching his leg. "The other you is there."

Freeman considered the other Joe Freeman, living his life, oblivious of Brightwell, in the rural idyll of Warwickshire. Did the bastard appreciate what he had, he wondered?

A move? He shook his head. "But it'd be no good!" he said, close to tears now. "I mean, I'd still be here, wouldn't I?"

Susanna smiled. "One of you would."

He peered into his glass, then looked up at Doug, who was staring at him. "I want to go back to Earth," he said. "I miss England. The beauty of the place... the sense of age, the things I took for granted when I was there, but can only appreciate now that I'm here. Christ, nostalgia is a terrible malady, Doug."

Later, Freeman thought back to the party and regretted his drunken honesty. What if some informer had overheard his woeful lament? The place was crawling with despicable yes-men, ready to denounce colleagues to curry favour and advance themselves.

A week later, Doug Hansen appeared at the magma plant just as Freeman's shift was ending. The sun was going down over the near horizon, but the three moons were rising: for the next four hours they would provide a magnesium half-light before the onset of the dark night proper.

Doug had hired a flier.

"I want to take you on a little trip," he explained as he escorted Freeman across to the vehicle. "Show you something."

They flew for two hours towards a range of central mountains, landing in the crumpled foothills where black water torrents tipped themselves like tongues of jet over cliffs of silver rock.

They stepped out beside an almost perfectly circular lagoon of sable water, like a brimming sink of crude oil, reflecting the bright light of the moons overhead.

Far away on the jungle horizon, Freeman made out the towering shape of the TelMass station, and beside it the magma plant.

"Beautiful," he said, "in its own way."

Doug had been quiet during the journey. Now he sat on an outcropping of rock and looked at Freeman through the tinted visor of his face-mask. Dressed from head to foot in scarlet coveralls, they appeared out of place in the alien landscape.

"What you said at that party the other week," he began, his voice muffled.

Freeman smiled. "Which party is that, exactly?" He

had attended parties and dinners every night for months.

"You talked with Susanna and myself. About Brightwell."

For a terrible, heart-stopping moment, Freeman thought that Doug was about to tell him that his indiscretion had got back to the Governor.

"What about it?"

Doug stood and walked towards the edge of the drop, staring out across the jungle as it extended to the horizon.

"You said you wanted to go back to Earth."

Freeman hesitated. "That's right, I did."

"How do you feel now?"

Doug still had his back to him. The effect of talking to someone like this was unnerving.

It came to him that Doug might be an informer, one of the many government men set up to report on the sins of fellow workers.

He dismissed the thought. He'd known Doug Hansen for years. He was aware that he'd reddened, ashamed of the groundless suspicion.

"I... I still feel the same. I don't like it here. I made a mistake. Perhaps I should have remained on Earth, even if that would have meant losing my job." He shrugged. "Of course, I'm being wise after the event."

"But you still want to go back to Earth?"

Freeman smiled and kicked a shard of shale. "It's a futile dream, but one that's never far away."

His friend was silent for a time, then said, "It's possible, Joe."

At first, Freeman was sure that he'd misheard. "Excuse me?"

Doug turned and stared at him. "I said it's possible. It isn't a dream. It's possible to go back to Earth."

Freeman smiled. "Yes – if I die on Earth, you mean. That's the only way the authorities would allow it."

But Doug was shaking his head, and Freeman's heart commenced a loud and laboured beating.

"There's another way, Joe. A way of sending you back to Earth – the real you who's standing here now, not some split."

Freeman shook his head. "I don't see how..."

Doug sat down, cross-legged, on the black sand. Freeman joined him.

"I want to tell you something. This is between you and me, okay? If it ever got out..."

"You know you can trust me."

Doug nodded and released a long sigh. "Okay. The Frankenberg Process – the splitting of individuals at the moment of translation... Scientists working for the Alliance have made an important discovery."

For the life of him, Freeman could not imagine what the discovery might be.

"We've known about it for a year now. The big-wigs use it, Carstairs and the others, when they move back and forth between Earth and the colonies."

"Back up, Doug. You've lost me. What do you mean, use it?"

Doug said, "They use the TelMass process, the translation, without splitting. It's no longer a corollary of TelMass travel. You can go to your destination without somatic duplication, without leaving yourself behind. I've been over-

seeing the process, in secret, for nearly six months."

Freeman felt dizzy. He held his head in his hands, working through the implications of what Doug had told him.

"But why hasn't it been made public?"

Doug snorted a laugh. "Think about it, Joe! It benefits the Alliance to split its workforce, to have all its top men and women duplicated. It's cost-effective, and that's all the government thinks about."

Freeman stared at the scimitar shape of the TelMass station on the horizon.

He felt at once anger at the treachery of the Alliance, and a rapidly growing elation at the possibility...

"Doug, you mean it? You said I could go...?"

Doug licked his lips, nervous. "It's a risk. If we're caught... But I can do it. There's a consignment of cargo going off in three days, late at night. Once it arrives at Warwick, it'll be placed in storage before being unpacked. All you have to do is get out."

"Earth..." he said. Emma, he thought,

"The thing is, Joe, once you're there, you'll need a new identity. You'll be starting a new life, after all. You can't go back to how it was. You, a version of you, is still there."

Christ, Freeman thought, to meet oneself, to see oneself as others see us...

Doug was watching him. "You're aware of the risks? You still want to go through with it?"

"If you're prepared to risk it, Doug, then nothing can stop me." He paused, considering. "What about at this end, though? Won't they investigate my disappearance?"

"Hire a flier the day before you go. Take it into the jungle and leave it there before meeting me at the station. Let the authorities assume the rest."

For the next three days, Freeman had little thought for his work. He considered his return to Earth, what he might do upon his arrival. The thought of existing in a familiar landscape, of perhaps meeting Emma once again, filled him with elation.

He said goodbye to Doug Hansen, took one last look around at the jungle crowding in over the deck of the TelMass derrick, and stepped into the container.

Doug gripped his shoulder in farewell, then sealed the lid. Simple pressure from the inside would release the seal once the journey was over.

He crouched in the darkness, his heart labouring. He closed his eyes. He could see, as in the recurring dreams of Earth he'd been having lately, the green vales of England.

The container tipped, surprising him, as it was transported out onto the deck prior to translation.

Long seconds elapsed. Minutes.

The minutes stretched to what seemed like an hour, two.

Then he heard the countdown, and braced himself for the pain.

It tore through him, searing his every nerve ending. It was all he could do to stop himself from screaming out loud.

And then, as quickly as it began, the pain ceased.

He was on Earth... and no longer in pain. This was the start of his renewed life, his new beginning.

The container tipped. He was transported across the

deck, tipped again, upright this time. Silence.

He would give it time, before unsealing the lid. Ten minutes, he thought. Then he'd take the service elevator to the parking lot. From there he could get a taxi into Warwick. He could withdraw sufficient funds from his account to set himself up in a new life somewhere.

He heard footsteps, shouted commands.

The container tipped. Light flooded in, blinding him, as the lid was forcibly removed.

Rough hands hauled him out. Security guards.

He was hauled to his feet and dragged from the container, aware only that this was the end. That there could be no salvation, now. He looked around him in disbelief, wanting to scream aloud in fear and desperation. He was not on Earth. Beyond the deck was the jungle of Beta Hydri 5.

But he had undergone translation, hadn't he? He had experienced the unmistakable, searing pain.

So what had happened?

And Doug? Oh, Jesus Christ...

Not only was he doomed – but Doug, too.

Then he looked across the deck towards the control room. Behind the long, rectangular viewscreen, two figures stood in silhouette. One was the Governor, the other Doug Hansen.

They were shaking hands.

As he was escorted across the deck between the guards, Freeman roared his rage at Doug's treachery, his lies.

T H R E E

Freeman heard the countdown and braced himself for the pain.

It tore through him, searing his every nerve ending. It was all he could do to stop himself screaming.

And then, as quickly as it began, the pain was gone.

He was on Earth... This was the start of his renewed life on Earth, his new beginning.

He heard footsteps ringing on the panels of the deck, and then shouts. "Start over here – we'll work though the consignment. They said he was concealed in a..." He lost the rest as the sound of his heartbeat deafened him.

He had been found out. Somehow, the authorities had discovered Doug's plan, notified the station personnel here.

He broke the seal on the lid and peered out. Half a dozen blue-uniformed security guards were moving across the deck, snapping the seals on containers identical to the one in which he was cowering.

Quickly he tipped the container and struggled free. In desperation he crawled across the deck and concealed himself behind a stack of crates. Beside him, on the deck, was an inspection cover. He lifted it and slipped inside, breathing more easily now that he was out of immediate danger. He pulled himself along the tight passage way until he came to a downshaft, then climbed the ladder to the corridor and exited in the elevator.

As he left the station, he wondered how he had been

found out, and if on Brightwell Doug Hansen was at this very second facing the terrible consequences...

He stared out of the taxi window at the green fields slipping by outside. It was hard to believe that just 15 minutes ago he had been on Brightwell, 20 light years away. Good God, but the beauty of the countryside was painful. He felt a stab of guilt as he considered Doug.

He instructed the driver to stop beside a cash-point on the outskirts of Warwick. He applied his palm to the dispenser and withdrew a thousand New Pounds, the maximum withdrawal allowable. It would set him up for a while.

He returned to the taxi, hesitated, and then gave the driver the address of his villa. There was the danger, of course, that security would send men to his house – but how could he begin a new life in England without seeing Emma for one last time?

As the vehicle turned off the main road and approached the hamlet along the familiar, winding lane, Freeman thought of his wife and the new life he would have to lead without her.

This would be a hard goodbye, unlike the last one.

The taxi halted outside the villa. He paid the driver and approached the house. Only then, as he pushed through the gate, did he notice that his own auto was standing in the drive.

But by then it was too late to turn and run.

A figure moved behind the study window, and seconds later the front door opened.

The figure halted on the top step, staring at him in disbelief. Freeman swayed, dizzy. He was staring at himself, an identical copy of himself, and yet, though familiar, this Joseph Freeman before him possessed an aura of difference. It was, he realized later, merely that he was viewing himself in his entirety, a figure in the context of his environment, as he had never before seen himself.

Freeman raised a hand. "I can explain."

"My God," his double said, moving down the steps and approaching him along the path.

Realizing that his double presented a danger, Freeman said, "We're the same, you and me. We need to work together."

"Jesus Christ, what happened?" His double was backing off, turning and running back into the villa.

If he contacted the authorities, warned Carstairs of what had happened... There was no way he could allow his double, in fright, to do that.

He gave chase.

The phone was in the kitchen, and that was where his double was heading.

Freeman sprinted after him, shouting, "Think about it! Listen to me..."

His double was already at the phone and frantically stabbing in the code. Freeman reached him and knocked the receiver from his grip.

"Listen to me!"

He looked into his own eyes, wide with fright, and did not like what he saw there. His fear, his cowardly reaction to the unknown.

His double backed towards a storage unit, and only

when he reached behind him and pulled open the drawer did Freeman realize what he intended.

His double dived at him with a nine-inch carving knife.

Freeman parried the blow, then managed to grip his double's arm, the blade of the knife inches away from his chest.

In desperation, realizing now that he was fighting for his life, he kned his double in the crotch and forced the knife away from him.

His double lurched forward, and before Freeman could react, slipped on to the blade. It buried itself deep in his chest, and Freeman could only stare in horror as he – as his double – fell onto his back and stared at the ceiling, blood pumping from the wound and staining his white shirt.

Seconds later his double gasped, and his eyes glazed over, and Freeman fell to his knees beside the body and wept.

He looked up at the clock on the wall. It was 3.30. Emma would be back at four.

How long had he been kneeling like this, sickened and disbelieving?

He had to move himself, get rid of the body.

He could always bury it in the garden – it would never be found: no one was looking for it, after all. But that would take time, and time he did not have.

He recalled his auto in the drive.

He tried to pick up the body, but was surprised by its weight. Instead of carrying the corpse, he dragged it through the hall.

At the front door, he dropped the legs and hurried out to the auto. He opened the boot and checked the lane. There was no one about. He returned to the villa and manhandled the corpse through the door, wincing as its head cracked repeatedly against the stone steps.

With difficulty, he managed to lift the body into the boot. Exhausted, he slammed the cover and locked it, then returned to the villa.

There was a slick of blood on the kitchen floor, and a great arc across the wall. He mopped up, then moved to the hall and scrubbed the carpet. He showered and changed, wadding his old, bloodstained clothes into a plastic bag and stashing it with the corpse in the boot of the auto.

He returned to the villa, sat in the lounge and worked to calm himself.

No one need know anything about the events of the last few minutes. He would slip into his old life, blameless. There would be a gap in his memory of a few months, but he need not worry unduly about that. He would get by.

No one, after all, would suspect what had happened.

He heard the sound of an auto in the lane.

Emma, he thought.

It would have been a momentous event as it was, to meet his wife again after so long – but now he would have to face her knowing that he had, albeit accidentally, murdered her husband.

Thirty minutes ago, he told himself, I killed myself.

There was a knock at the door. But why would Emma bother knocking?

He left the lounge and moved to the hall. He made out two indistinct figures through the glass of the door.

He opened the door and stared. General Carstairs and

his aide, Richards. He tried to remain calm. He reminded himself that he had nothing at all to worry about.

"Freeman," the General said. "We need to talk. Something rather untoward has cropped up."

His mind racing, Freeman showed the men into the lounge. They sat side by side on the sofa, refused a drink, and stared at him.

"Sit down," Carstairs said.

Trembling, he did so.

"This is a damned difficult situation, Freeman. Technically, of course, you're innocent."

"What happened?" he asked.

"Something occurred on Brightwell earlier today, an... indiscretion, let's say, involving yourself. That is, your Frankenberg-split. To cut a long story short, he managed to return to Earth illegally. We're doing all we can at this end to locate and arrest him."

He nodded, wondering how they had discovered Doug's plan in the first place.

He saw where this meeting was leading.

He gestured. "I don't see how this involves me."

"Technically, of course, you're not to blame. However, your Frankenberg-split did contravene Alliance edicts. He's under arrest on Brightwell as we speak, and of course can expect to suffer the consequences."

Freeman nodded, understanding suddenly hitting him like an unexpected uppercut.

His Frankenberg-split was under arrest on Brightwell. Then everything Doug had told him...

There was no such thing as a one-way trip!

Doug had been lying, all along, in order to entrap him. The bastard was a loyal Alliance man, through and through.

The General was saying, "Such is the law that, in these situations, the innocent party must suffer certain consequences."

Freeman nodded. "I see." His pulse raced, and he realized that he was sweating. "What can I expect...?"

Carstairs waved. "No criminal proceedings, of course. But we will have to relieve you of your post as Director of the plant. Unfortunate, but the circumstances leave us with no other option. We'll find you some government admin post in town."

Freeman nodded, a sensation of relief sweeping through him. He would lead a reduced life-style, but he would have his freedom, and Emma.

"Of course," Richards was saying, "we'll have to requisition the house, as government property."

"Of course. I understand."

His visitors stood. General Carstairs nodded. "Very well, Freeman. I think that will be all for now. You'll need to appoint a lawyer. There'll be an official hearing in a month or so."

He showed the men to the door. They walked down the drive, past his auto, and stopped.

Carstairs and Richards spoke in hushed tones, glancing at the vehicle, and a hand closed around Freeman's heart, squeezing.

Carstairs returned to the front door.

"The auto is government property, too. If you could give Richards the key-card, he'll return it to the plant."

It was all Freeman could do to remain upright. He felt the blood drain from his face, and he could not find the words to protest.

He reached into his pocket for his key-card – but of course it was not there.

“Ah...” he found himself saying. “If I could possibly keep the car for an hour. You see, I pick up my wife from school around now. I could always drop the car at the plant myself...”

Carstairs returned to Richards. They conferred, and Freeman realized that his life depended on the General's next few words. He turned to Freeman.

“Very well,” General Carstairs said, “but get it back by tonight, understood?”

“Perfectly, sir,” Freeman said, and prayed that his wife would not choose that second to return.

He watched the men climb into their auto and move off down the lane.

Freeman sat in the lounge and considered his future. Short term, he would dispose of the body tonight, before returning the car. Long term... He considered his experiences, the treachery of the man he had once considered his best friend.

The terrible thing about living in a totalitarian state was that one could not be true to oneself... He saw again the fear in his double's eyes.

He knew a lot, he thought. What he could tell the so-called enemy about the magma plant process...

A minute later Emma steered her auto into the drive, and seconds after that she appeared in the doorway to the lounge. The sight of her, after so long, was shocking.

He stood, heart pounding. Emma approached him, reached up and kissed him on the cheek.

He put his hands on her shoulders, delaying her withdrawal. He could feel tears welling in his eyes.

He hugged her to him, relishing her warmth, her reality. “What's for dinner, Joe? I'm famished.”

He considered what he had to tell her about his imminent demotion. He could do that over a meal.

“I thought I'd treat you, Emma. Take you out for dinner, okay?”

She smiled. “Anywhere in mind?”

“I know a lovely little Indian place in Warwick,” Freeman said. “It's called the Shah Jehan.”

Eric Brown is the author of many sf books, including *The Time-Lapsed Man* (1990), *Meridian Days* (1992), *Engineman* (1994), *Blue Shifting* (1996), *Penumbra* (1999) and *New York Nights* (Gollancz, 2000). We published his first story in 1987, and his more recent contributions here include “Hunting the Starque” (issue 141), “The People of the Nova” (issue 150), “The Children of Winter” (issue 163) and “Ascent of Man” (issue 167). He lives in Haworth, West Yorkshire, and www.ericbrown.co.uk is his website address.

interzone

The leading British magazine that specializes in SF and new fantastic writing. Among many other writers, we have published

BRIAN ALDISS RAMSEY CAMPBELL GARRY KILWORTH
JOHN SLADEK J.G. BALLARD RICHARD COWPER
DAVID LANGFORD BRIAN STABLEFORD
IAIN BANKS JOHN CROWLEY MICHAEL MOORCOCK
BRUCE STERLING BARRINGTON BAYLEY
THOMAS M. DISCH RACHEL POLLACK LISA TUTTLE
GREGORY BENFORD MARY GENTLE KEITH ROBERTS
IAN WATSON MICHAEL BISHOP WILLIAM GIBSON
GEOFF RYMAN CHERRY WILDER DAVID BRAIN
M. JOHN HARRISON BOB SHAW GENE WOLFE

interzone has introduced many excellent new writers, and illustrations, articles, interviews, film and book reviews, news, etc.

interzone is available from specialist bookshops, or by subscription.

- ☐ For six issues, send £18 (outside UK, £21, USA \$32).
 - ☐ For twelve issues, send £34 (outside UK, £40, USA \$60)
- Single copies: £3.50 inc. p&dp (outside UK, £4, USA, \$6)
Outside Europe, all copies are despatched by accelerated surface mail.

To: **interzone** 217 Preston Drive, Brighton, BN1 6FL, UK

Name
Address

Please send me six/twelve issues of *Interzone*, beginning with the current issue.

I enclose a cheque/p.o./

international money order for the sum of

made payable to *Interzone*

(delete as applicable)

OR please charge my MasterCard/Visa:

Card number

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Expiry date

	/	
--	---	--

Signature

--

If you'd rather not cut up your magazine, feel free to photocopy this form, or even write the salient information on a separate sheet of paper



Wind Angels

Leigh Kennedy

Drift-stuff: a fluorescent light tube, unbiodegraded snack wrappers, a baby's blue plastic train, foam from a bra cup, a plastic bowl, drinks bottles, half a CD and a pencil stub. No human parts this morning.

These were today's offerings. Colina wondered if everything would eventually rise to the surface, urged out of their places by the downstream tides of the Severn Sea.

Dappled by rain, the water stank of rot and greasy grime. Colina stared absently at the flat, handleless clock on the dark surface. Rain soaked her long brown hair until it was like cold snakes on her back and shoulders. She knelt at the edge of the lake, her knees straddling the white stripe on the tarmac only a finger-length from where the road dipped below the surface.

She felt as scattered and useless as the drift-stuff. Once they had all had a function and a place and a relation to people.

She wished everything would lie quietly, including herself. If I walk down this road, she thought, into the water and down, I will find the bridge. I would stand on it and look up through the lake. In her mind, she stood on the bridge, the drowned town all around her and tried to imagine Mat standing with her.

"Steady," said a man's voice behind her.

Colina turned her head and stared straight into the face of a hungry-looking rat waddling

fearlessly towards her hand. Making a sound of revulsion, she half-rose.

From behind her an old chair leg swung down, breaking the back of the rat. The rat's mouth opened in pain. Colina turned away from the further beating, shuddering.

Ewart again, she thought. In recent months, he often appeared just behind or beside her.

"Why do you do that?" he asked. He gestured towards the water. "Kneel at the lake every morning?"

"I'm waiting for the good old days. Maybe they'll just pop up." She tried to make it a joke but even she couldn't smile.

"You would do better looking for the future, Colina," he said. His long nose rain-spattered in spite of the hooded raincoat, he watched her steadily.

"Future!" she said angrily. She stood, the spell of remembering broken.

He stepped back away from her, long legs like a shore bird's, and dropped the chair leg on the road.

Then she remembered her manners. "Thanks, Ewart," she said.

Without even a glance over her shoulder, she continued her journey around the water of Brocksblade New Lake.

Few lights burned in the houses at this hour but the market was already coming to life with the dull grey dawn. When Colina reached Francie's stall, she unpacked the patchwork kimono she had made. "It was supposed to be a quick one but it's taken me weeks."

Francie's fingertips guided her eyes as she made an expert examination. "You've done a good job. Been in all these nights, eh, Colina?"

"Where else."

"You *could* come to visit me," Francie said in a half-irritated, half-affectionate tone. "I'm almost tired of asking. So just take it for granted that you can come around any evening. OK?"

Colina sighed. "Sorry. I just..." She felt too weary to work out any more apology. Her stomach rumbled as she smelled bread, "coffee" and curry spices from somewhere within the market. She hugged herself against the chilly morning.

Francie shrugged, then seemed to look for another topic. "Your rashes look sore today."

Colina touched her cheeks, peeling and finely ribbed with deep red eczema. She had gone to sleep the night before without putting her cotton mitts on and had probably scratched in her sleep.

"Did you hear the landslip last night?" Francie asked. "Big one."

"No," Colina said, half-wondering if Francie was evading payment for the kimono. "Where was that?"

"Up on the hill by Canterbury Road. About eleven. You know the Patels who used to have the chemists? You know – they both work at the hospital now. Luckily, they were visiting relations."

Colina thought back to the night before. She had been putting the last of the hem in the kimono about then. "I heard it. I thought it was thunder. So they weren't hurt?"

"No, but apparently the house is half-buried." Francie shook her head, even though there had been a note of rel-

ish in the story. "One thing after another."

Colina shrugged.

Francie hung the kimono in prize position on the central bar of her stall where she also sold household textiles, new and second-hand clothes and haberdashery. "I'm short of cash today, Col. Would you like to make a fair trade?"

Colina groaned, feeling the two coins in her pocket. She'd had too many fair trades with Francie – there was nothing from Francie's stall that Colina needed. "I'm broke and out of veg. Can you give me enough for today's groceries? Owe me the rest."

"OK." Francie looked over the top of her glasses at her. "Three vouchers for community meals."

"No, I don't want community meals," Colina protested.

"It would do you good. Even if you sat at table on your own..."

"Francie, leave me alone."

Francie's eyes widened in indignation. "I *have*. For two years now you've been moping around and I still have this stupid idea you're my friend. Do you want to eat today or not?"

Feeling trapped but hungry, Colina stood stubbornly silent for a moment. Because her gas and electricity payments had shot up yet again, beyond her regular pay, she had little margin to be unyielding.

"All right," she said. She refused to look Francie in the eye but stared at her cash box until the woman opened it and handed Colina three notes.

If only I had the money to buy a bottle of brandy, she thought, looking down the many stalls of the market. Even if she were as rich as an oilman, she knew that she probably wouldn't be able to find it here anyway, although there would be plenty of beer or local wine. As things were, she couldn't afford to *smell* a luxury like spirits.

Oh, to be slightly pissed, standing in the sunshine

Then Colina saw her enemy. With short tousled gingery-blond hair, Sarah's appearance had been changing in some subtle way that Colina couldn't identify until today. The way she stood with her feet apart, a puffiness, the secret smile. She's pregnant. Colina's heart thumped with hatred, but as always, she stared in fascination.

Mat had died for her and now she was having someone else's baby.

Why her? she wondered. Was it her hair, her eyes, her voice, her ways in bed? Why had he married her in the first place? Why would he *die* for her?

Sarah's glance met Colina's briefly, hesitated a fraction of a moment, then she appeared to become completely absorbed in the market's range of carrots.

"Hey, there's your boyfriend, Col," Francie laughed.

Colina turned and saw Ewart just across the path from them, lingering around the fishmonger's but obviously not shopping for fish. She was certain that he had been watching her again.

"I wish you wouldn't say that," she said in a low voice to Francie.

"OK. If not your boyfriend, then your watch dog, eh?"

"More like." Colina gave Francie a wry smile.

"Have you heard that he's taken in the Halls? You

know, that old couple who were living on London Road. They were living pretty miserably, apparently. He's made them happy Mrs Hall was down here yesterday, buying some towels, giggling like a school girl about how wonderful he is." Francie rolled her eyes. "Do you remember how weird we used to think he was? Now he's –"

"Still weird," Colina finished.

"Yes, but, he's so everywhere now. Doing things. You know? I never expected him to be a big shot."

"He's not a big shot," Colina said. "Big shots got us into to trouble. Ewart's..." She realized how defensive she sounded. "I mean... Have you heard today's weather forecast? Supposed to be sun."

Francie began to tell her about a programme she had watched concerning the disappearance of the Nile River. "It's not fair, is it? Why can't we send them our New Lakes?"

Barely listening, Colina watched with a growing feeling of confusion as Ewart had moved down the market and towards Sarah. He stood beside her, as if thinking deeply, then spoke to her.

Francie moved slightly to see what Colina watched. She clucked her tongue. "Well, perhaps not your watch dog, after all," she said. "Maybe he's given up on you, Col."

Sarah glanced up through the distance at Colina. As if given a mild electric shock, Colina twitched and turned her back on them. "Got to go," she said. "I need breakfast before I go to work."

"Eat a good breakfast," Francie recommended. "They've got eggs today."

"Yeah, yeah," Colina said, leaving the market the long way around.

The former DIY building retained its old paprika-red colour but where there had once been a car park now sat a sodden playground, at the moment empty, and a greenhouse. Never able to remember which days were toddler groups or film or the French language clubs, Colina peered around for a quiet space before going through the gate into the food hall. It was fairly empty now but still smelling of toast and bacon. This week, the mismatched kitchen tables and chairs salvaged from floods were arranged in diagonal patterns. Someone was always messing with the layout, trying to find a way to suit everyone. Colina was late; most of the tables were empty except for those who lingered over one more dandelion-chicory coffee.

Even though they often gave out discount vouchers on energy bills, Colina disliked community eating, partly because of the chance of seeing Sarah, partly because of the quality of food but also because there were often council people in here, meddling, doing politics, asking for opinions, support or volunteers. Before the floods, she had worked in the town hall; every old familiar face gave her a peculiar pain.

"I'm too late for eggs, aren't I?" she said to the girl behind the counter.

The girl nodded.

"Any oranges?"

"Not this week."

Colina shrugged. "Porridge with double honey and toast, please. And a coffee."

Tray in hand, Colina wandered among the tables for a moment, trying to find one she liked. One of the old oaks always reminded her of the kitchen table her family had when she was young. It was covered with palm tops and coffee mugs this morning as a group of town councillors seemed to be carrying on a working discussion. She sat down at a smaller table because it had her favourite newspaper on it, leaving her coat on as the huge room felt draughty.

In the DIY days, this had been the locks and doorknobs area, she decided, looking around the hall. Over there, the gardening supplies where the film club now met. And over in there, had been the lamps and lampshades. And there, the paint.

Colina stirred her porridge, staring into the corner of the building which used to have so many shelves of paint – indoor, outdoor, gloss, flat, masonry, wood stain. She tried to conjure the memory of accidentally meeting Sarah and Mat here. Her neighbours. Oh, hello! they all said, Mat giving her a hot look from behind Sarah's shoulder. Colina could picture Sarah's face vividly, but Mat's memory had gone watery. She couldn't seem to settle on the right expressions or gestures.

"Mind if we sit with you?"

Oh, no. Colina made an attempt to smile at Mrs Hall who was holding her tray with a twin version of Colina's breakfast. "No, not at all," she lied. She folded the newspaper as Mr Hall and Ewart followed.

Mr and Mrs Hall sat opposite each other, Ewart directly across the table from Colina. He gave her a half-quizzical look, as if silently asking permission for himself. This was a bolder move than usual; Francie had once pointed out that Ewart often looked absolutely terrified by Colina. He must feel safe with the Halls to buffer the social space.

Colina shrugged and began to eat her porridge.

Ewart had a bigger breakfast of braised apples, cheesy oat biscuits as well as porridge and a pot of tea which he set upon with obvious appetite. He was an active outdoor worker, though. And a man. Men always eat more, Colina thought. This was the first time she could recall seeing Ewart eat although she must have done some time in her life, even if in the distance. He had always seemed the sort to live on nothing, a sort of solar-powered oddball. Her earliest clear memory of him was ages ago, one day when she recognized him as one of the big kids from her school, standing on his head for five hours straight in the old town centre to collect money for Bangladesh. He had been just as weird at school, cartwheeling or doing handsprings across the school playing fields too strange to do team sports but still full of play.

But by being an obsessive oddball, he'd made good with his early fascination with windmills and solar gadgets and was now indispensable to the local energy council.

These days, she barely ever saw him without rain running off his bright orange raincoat onto his face. Indoors, he looked different, more normal somehow, though his hands trembled and his face appeared flushed, as if he were nervous.

"We've moved into one of Ewart's spare rooms," Mrs

Hall said. "It's a marvellous house."

"Not quite finished," Ewart said a bit absently, as if applying his mind to the tasks that still needed doing.

"I thought it might be cold without radiators but Ewart's made all the floors ever so warm with the solar heating," Mrs Hall beamed.

"Oh, I see." Colina nodded politely, remembering what Francie had said about Mrs Hall gushing over Ewart. "Must be nice to be off the grid. No blackouts. No bills."

"It's a lot of work for Ewart," said Mrs Hall. "Composting, tending the generator and the wind turbines."

"I don't mind," Ewart said, staring over Colina's head, thoughtfully. "Rain's clearing. Yahoo."

Mr Hall ate silently. He had tremors and seemed to use up his entire concentration on getting spoon to mouth and back again safely.

One of the men from the other tables came across and put his hand on Ewart's shoulder. Colina recognized him as one of the local councillors. "Did you hear about the Patels?"

"Yes. Anything I can do?" Ewart said without hesitation.

"Do you still have a spare room in your house?"

The question obviously speared him. Ewart's expression transformed from earnest concern to a sort of trapped bafflement. Colina thought he became even pinker and one of his cheese oat biscuits broke in his shaking hand. "Uhm, yes. Yes, I do. But it's not much room for two people," he said, recovering. "Do they have somewhere to stay tonight?"

The councillor made a so-so gesture with both his hand and his head. "I think they've gone to her mother's house. It's crowded there."

"I might be able to find them a flat," Ewart said. "Give me a day."

"Ewart, that would be terrific!" the councillor said, giving his shoulder a hearty thump. "I'll get in touch with you later on, let you know the situation."

Once the councillor had returned to his table, which now Colina realized was an informal town meeting of sorts, Mrs Hall shook her head. "Those poor people."

Colina assumed she meant the Patels.

Finished with her porridge, Colina wrapped both hands around her coffee mug for warmth. She glanced up at Ewart, who was gazing at her steadily. Something seemed to snap in his thoughts, making his expression suddenly more business-like.

"May I propose a trade?" he said abruptly.

"What's that?"

"I can get you something for your rashes. Would you mend a pair of my trousers?"

Biting back the words, "That's very *personal*," she felt flustered. Suddenly her cheeks burnt with extra fire. Both the Halls watched her with interest.

"I can't see to thread a needle these days," Mrs Hall apologized. "And my husband never was much of a seamstress." Then the couple chuckled across the table at each other as if to an embedded marital joke.

"It's good cream," Ewart said. "I saw it work on someone else overnight."

"Fair trade, I accept," Colina said mechanically, regret-

ting it almost as it came out. It seemed so... personal. But it was a fair trade. She probably had one of the few sewing machines in town so it wouldn't take long to do some mending. And she would do almost anything to get rid of the tormenting rashes. Just the mention of them started her itching. She rubbed one cheek lightly with her knuckle.

"Not the zip, is it?" she said as an afterthought.

"No." Ewart stood suddenly, leaving a brimming tea and a quarter of his porridge. "Sunshine! Work window! I'm off!" he said and strode out of the cafeteria.

"Busy man," Mr Hall said in a rasping voice. "Busy young man."

Colina bowed her head over her coffee mug, not daring to look towards the fading ghosts of Mat and the shelves of paint shimmering amid the jumble of tables for fear of not seeing anything. What has my life come to?

If only I could stand in dry, hot sunshine...

With ten more minutes left before she had to leave for her mid-morning shift on postal relay, she started an e-mail on her antiquated desktop computer to her brother, who had moved to Germany two years ago.

"Today we're having better weather," she typed, glancing out her window at a clear patch of blue. "And not too many power cuts lately."

As if in response to her words her screen went dead grey. "Not again!" she moaned. "Oh, damn. Oh, hell." She unplugged the computer, then reluctantly put on her boots and coat to leave for work.

When she got to the post office, she realized that the power cut wasn't just to her road but affecting the whole town. One of her early shift co-workers said that it was a regional problem and would be sorted out by evening. But everyone seemed in a cheerful enough mood anyway.

The sun was out and the sky was blue overhead; a creeping line of storms coming in from the west wouldn't arrive for hours still.

Once Colina's cart was loaded, the boss came down to lock the boxes. "Hiya, Colina, you all right?" he said brightly.

"Getting along," she said.

"Good, good. You should have a nice journey today. You probably won't even need the battery."

"Thanks." She mounted her solar-canopied cart and set off. Luckily the drive out of the depot was downhill; the loaded cart usually took some urging to get going. Heading along the "lazy" road as the relay drivers all called it, she wouldn't have to climb the steep hill to escape Brockslade New Lake but go the long way around the east hill. The valley had once been deep with a river running through it; now it was more like a double-spouted ladle connecting a chain of lakes feeding into the Severn Sea. The development of buildings and roads had been pushed higher with the loss of the village centre. Sometimes the tiny cart engine wasn't strong enough to get over the hill and the drivers would have to walk alongside it to ease the load.

She puttered near enough Bristol Road to see the Patel house, a heap of earth mounded over the back rooms, roof crumpled by the uprooted tree, windows shattered. Workmen in bright orange jackets swarmed the area. It looked as if they were assessing the safety of the house next along

the road, also near a bank of earth. The Patel house had been a good one; they were a relatively prosperous couple but money offered limited protection against natural events.

Colina had wondered if this landslip meant an insurance day for her, working in the mutual clean-up and repair crew. But the house would have to be rebuilt first before she would be called in on the decorating crew. Maybe the Patels had the other kind of insurance, though. Just money.

Over her right shoulder, she could look down into the town. The sun shone on the jagged surface of the New Lake where the top of the old school, the station tower and other roofs and prominences still stood proud of the water. Colina checked the high tide lake level at the clock tower, just licking the railings below the clock face. The lake level was still rising but very slowly now.

There were rumours in town that when the lake level reached the clock face, Brockslade would be evacuated. But she didn't believe it. People would move up one more row of houses. There were so few places to go and people were nearly doubled up anyway.

She was lucky to have retained her privacy in her single-roomed flat.

She followed a bend in the road and the sun shone fully on her face. The warmth was delicious.

If I could eat this weather, it would taste like rum and butter and have the texture of rose petals, she thought. Might yet last a few more hours. She glanced to the west, hoping that she could get back from this relay in time to miss the evening rain.

She wound round the hillside, climbing steadily, changing down to first gear, slipping out of Brockslade's houses. Past the cemetery.

When Mat had been buried, few people had known about their affair. Colina had stood behind the small gathering, shadowed in the public eye by Sarah's grief. Even in a town weary of funerals in those three years of successive huge floods, it was a special ceremony – the burial of a brave hero who had saved his wife's life, sacrificing his own in the nightmare currents raging through the town.

Why. Whywhywhy did it have to happen to *him*?

Only an hour before he had died, he had been in her flat, in her bed, teasing her about the number of shoes she had. "When I leave Sarah and come here, I'll have to compete with all these shoes for your attention, won't I?"

Colina winced. She had been a smart dresser with a good job in the town hall where she had worn suits and heels and made her rashless face up every day. What would Mat think of me now? Like most people, she wore patchwork, mended and recycled clothes, sensible all-weather ankle boots.

Passing at trotting speed, she could pick out only the area of Mat's headstone, but felt a judgmental gaze from all the marble slabs.

Beyond the cemetery, stood the first 30 of Brockslade's wind turbines on black lattice towers. They had risen shortly after the middle floods, like angels of the wind, guarding the town, nourishing their shocked civilization with heat, light and communication.

Under 30 minutes out of town, she spotted a figure on

a distant rise, flying a kite. Or fighting a kite, for it dipped and whirled, the streamers jerking and flapping crazily.

Oh, no, not again, she thought. She would have to drive past him.

He grew larger as she travelled along the ridged hill. He had tamed the kite and it floated, a dark blue diamond in a pale blue sky, streamers rippling gently in unison. After watching it fly peacefully for several minutes, he examined the string, then reeled it in slowly.

By the time Colina reached him, he had brought the kite down and hammered a knee-high wooden stake in the ground. He was on his telephone as Colina drove the postal cart past. He nodded to her but continued his conversation of which Colina caught a few words: "...30-metre rotors..."

With Ewart behind her, she felt a strange emptiness at his preoccupation when, in town, she often saw distant, shy and longing stares directed at her. She remembered him seeking out Sarah. How strange that he had quietly shadowed Colina for so long, barely speaking to her, and yet he could walk up to someone like Sarah and chat.

I don't want him to talk to me, she remembered.

When she reached Bill's post office in Easthurst, the line of storm hung over the western hills, a mighty range of white-peaked blue-bottomed thunderheads. The wind would be in her face on the way home but she felt as mellowed as if she had been in a hot bath from her sunny drive. "Hi," she said to old Bill when he came out of his door.

"Afternoon," he said shortly.

Bill had been friendly to her when she first started the job. After she had been distant, preoccupied with grief, too often, he had grown formal and businesslike only.

"Nice day," she said, for the first time wishing that she could make things friendly again. The sunshine seemed to call for it.

"At the present."

She swapped over carts, taking his locked and loaded cart and turning it round on the road. Bill locked up his shop and he and Colina headed in opposite directions.

She wheeled on lightly with a reduced load, in spite of having the wind against her. The air had cooled; she could see lightning in the thunderheads in the distance but she had plenty of time.

When she reached the spot where Ewart had been, she saw no sign of him. Further on, she spotted the blue kite, away from the road. Surely, he knows enough not to fly a kite with a storm coming. She motored on.

She reckoned that the storm was at least an hour away but she would reach home in under half an hour. Ewart doesn't need me looking after him.

He'll be fine, she thought.

When she could no longer see the kite, she remembered that he had a phone.

Why should I worry about him?

Driving on, she thought about the way he had eaten this morning. So human, so... hungry. But his hunger was probably a deserved one, he worked so hard for others all day long then, in whatever spare hours he found, apparently laboured away on his odd-looking house on the south side of the village. From the distance, it looked

like a shed with an over-sized sun porch jammed into the side of the hill.

After five minutes, she turned the cart around and went back to the spot where the blue kite had flown. She stood at the edge of the road, peering down into the wooded valley, a pretty green landscape of hedges and a farm under an increasingly dramatic sky as the sunlight slanted under the edge of the clouds. No signs of people anywhere.

Cupping her hands to her mouth, she shouted, "Oi, Ewart!" and waited. But there was no answer. Her voice was too small.

Then she spotted movement on the hillside. She saw a man without a coat, long-limbed and lean, doing cartwheels along the road, spinning like a lazy four-bladed windmill, his bare arms and face golden in the winter sunlight.

Playing.

She returned to the cart and pattered back into Brockslade New Lake, feeling an unusual, indefinable restlessness, arriving at least 15 minutes before the storm broke.

When she arrived, her boss handed her an envelope with only her first name written across it. She opened it as she made the first steps for home but stopped dead still when she read the note inside.

Dear Colina,

Please meet me at 2pm in the food hall. I have something to give you.

Sarah

Colina wished that the market were still open so she could talk to Francie first. No time to find her at home now. Her heart thumped and she felt a flickering of nerves all through her body, feeling under attack.

The sky darkened almost as if dusk. She hurried to the food hall and stood at the gate, watching all within for a moment. She had missed lunch but her appetite was now buried by nerves. The power had returned so the fluorescent strips shone brightly down from the high ceiling. Most of the people at the tables were wizened and white-haired, some playing cards, some just sitting vacantly, most with a pot of tea and a plate of biscuits in front of them.

Then she spotted Sarah's mother, then Sarah herself as made her way through the tables towards Colina.

Her head and hands filled with dread, Colina pushed through the gate.

"Hi," Sarah said. Without her coat on, Sarah's mounded belly was now obvious.

"Hello."

She pointed to the nearest table. "I won't take up much of your time."

They sat down across from each other. Colina didn't know whether to look directly at her or not. It was one thing to stare hatred at a person from many metres, another thing to be within the same breathing space. She watched Sarah's hands as she opened her backpack and pulled out a square envelope.

Colina glanced at Sarah's pained face as she said meekly, "I want to give you some pictures of Mat."

Colina took the envelope and opened it. Inside was a

CD but folded up with it were some paper print-outs. Mat, leaning on his car. Mat, grinning, holding a mug in his kitchen. Mat, sitting on his sofa at home.

"I gather that he loved you," Sarah said. "Our marriage was going wrong even before he started... with you. I wanted kids, he didn't. You know how he was – always got his way..."

He's so *young*, Colina thought, looking at the photo. So young, so untested, so...

"I have someone else now anyway," Sarah continued. "I just want you to stop hating me. I don't want to explain to my kid why you glare at me all the time. Can we make a truce?"

Colina looked up at Sarah in confusion. Was there some mistake? Are these really photos of Mat? A truce? A boyfriend? Not Ewart?

"These are the only photos I can give you," Sarah said, her voice now more anxious, as if she felt it was going wrong. "You wouldn't want ones with me in. My mum had these. You know I lost everything in the flood."

Nodding dumbly, Colina looked from Sarah to the photos. "It's all right. Thank you."

"So... are we normal now?"

"Normal?" Colina echoed, puzzled.

"Not enemies."

"Oh..."

Sarah's eyes filled. "He didn't know he was going to die when he rescued me. I didn't make him do it, Colina. It was an accident. We didn't know how dangerous it was."

Colina nodded. "OK," she whispered.

"I've got to get back to my mum," Sarah said, taking a deep breath, turning to the table where her mother watched them with a concerned look.

"OK." Colina tucked the paper photos and the disk into the envelope. "Thanks, Sarah. I won't stare at you any more."

Sarah smiled slightly. "Good luck then."

When she left the food hall, the rain had started again. She trotted up towards her flat, hardly able to breathe for the tightness inside her. Once indoors, she took out the envelope, studying it as if she could see the pictures right through it.

She's given me a dead man, Colina thought. This is the past. The past. Gone.

It didn't hurt. She felt nothing. That frightened her.

Then she opened her desk drawer, threw the envelope in and collapsed on her bed.

When she woke in the early evening, she had the impression that the wind rattled her windows, as it used to do before they were redone. But someone knocked on her door. She switched on her bedside lamp, relieved that the power was on, and reluctantly threw back the warm quilt she had been under.

The knock paused, then just as she reached the door there came another rap. She opened the door to Ewart, who had a bag and a flat box in his hands.

"Oh. Hello." She shivered and crossed her arms.

"I've brought the cream and my mending," he said hoarsely.

"Oh, yes. Come in." She smelled food as he lurched inward.

"I've brought you something to eat," he said. "I... I..." He grew red-faced and visibly trembling. "I knocked earlier. There was no answer. I looked through the window and saw you asleep."

Colina flinched.

He seemed to sense her reaction. "I didn't mean to... I... thought you might be hungry." He glanced wildly around the room, lightly hefting the things he carried. "I didn't mean..."

"It's all right," she said, wanting him to stop tormenting himself. "It's kind of you to bring me food. Beyond a fair trade."

"No," he said, breathing a bit more easily. "A gift."

"Thank you." She cleared a space on the other side of her table behind the computer. She seldom had anyone in; since her flat had been divided, it felt too crowded anyway, even if she had ever felt like company. She opened the box and found a plate of what might be real meat sausages, mash, carrots, onion and sprigs of parsley. "Parsley," she said.

"From the kitchen window sill," he said.

"So you're a herb gardener, too."

"Mrs Hall brought it. It's nice." He wiped at the back of his neck as if to rub off his tension, studying her flat. "It's smaller here than I thought."

"I used to have a separate bedroom but they chopped us up and made a third flat between. You know lessening the footprint and all."

He pulled her curtain aside and studied her window frames, then spotted her gas boiler and examined that as well. Colina stood in the middle of the room, uncertainly. The smell of the food had roused her appetite but she didn't know how to shoo him out to leave her in peace.

"Do you have any coffee?" he asked.

Colina almost smiled at his gaucheness. "Would you like some?"

"Yes, thanks." He turned to look at her. "I'll make it. You eat before it gets too cold."

"OK." Colina fetched her knife and fork and tucked in.

Ewart knocked on the wall by the door. "Has this been drylined?"

She shook her head. "Too damp."

"Is this house still on the grid?"

She nodded. "You haven't put up enough windmills, yet, I suppose."

"I'm working on it. Your heating bills must be a lot."

"Huge compared to my pay cheque."

He went into her shower room and made knocking noises, turned the tap on for a short burst. She heard the scrape of porcelain as if he had taken the lid off the toilet tank for a look. The kettle whistled and Ewart crossed the flat in four huge strides to it. He opened the cupboard and peered in. "You don't have coffee," he said, holding up her jar of dandelion-chicory.

"You didn't expect –" she said, annoyed.

He picked up the bag he had brought and pulled out a jar of coffee. "Do you like this?"

"Real coffee?"

"People give me things all the time. I'm more of a tea drinker myself."

"Coffee..." Colina watched him make two cups then set one beside her. She had forgotten how real coffee smells; the fragrance elicited restaurants, luxury. The past. For a fraction of a second, she saw Mat in her mind's eye but he slipped away into a cold darkness.

Ewart watched her intently, perched on the corner of her bed, sipping his steaming coffee.

She pushed her mostly empty plate aside, no longer hungry. The coffee was still too hot for her. She couldn't think of anything to say or do.

Two awkward people, she thought, matching his tension against hers. He won. She could sense it.

"I have to ask you something," he finally said. "Oh, no, first... your face." He stood, whisked her plate back to the sink, went into the shower room and returned with a face flannel.

Colina put her hands up to her cheeks. "No, wait –"

But he moved with the certainty of a man who knew how to do things. "He said first to warm up your skin." Kneeling beside her chair, Ewart folded the flannel and pressed it against one cheek then the other gently, looking from Colina's eyes to her cheeks, as if monitoring her. It was warm but made her itch. She became rigid with suppressed reactions. He was too close; she felt as if her rash was burning more deeply into her flesh.

"Colina, I need to ask you something," he said in that hoarse voice again.

"What's that?"

He reached into his bag and brought out a jar of white cream. His hands shook as he unscrewed the lid. He touched one finger to the top of the cream then spread the cream on her rash with a tiny circular motion.

It soothed.

"Would you like to live in my house?"

Colina could hardly breathe. He was so close. Existing so long in the coldness of mourning, she had forgotten how other people gave off heat. They say a man at rest was worth at least 60 watts. A man as tall as Ewart was probably worth 70 and, trembling as he was, probably radiating even more. His long fingers moved over her cheek, touching her lightly, easing a discomfort she had suffered so long, she had forgotten it wasn't natural.

"This place would be better for a couple, like the Patels," he said. "At my house, you will have your own room. You'll be warmer. No power cuts. No heating bills. I want to do a garden but... I'm not so good at some things and you might be. It's not quite finished yet. Lots of rough spots. If you are unhappy with us, I will find you another place. But..."

For a few seconds, they looked directly at each other. Colina could sense the hopes beyond this in his eyes.

"I don't think –" she began.

"Don't answer tonight," he said abruptly, turning his head aside. "Tell me tomorrow. I have to answer the Patels by midday tomorrow."

She felt she could say no more then. In silence, again he dipped his finger in the cream and smoothed it with great care over her rashes, his expression that of barely

controlled sorrow. He knew what her answer would be.

In the moment more that he treated her, Colina saw him closely. Recently shaven, he had a tiny nick in his chin. His clothes, a faded sweatshirt over a slightly frayed but clean shirt, still smelled of fresh air but underneath lurked a tang of sweat. His hair was awry but his eyes had a glittering clarity, in spite of their present mournful expression.

How long had it been since I've *looked* at another person? Colina wondered.

When he finished with her medication, he rose, washed his hands, put on his coat and paused at the door long enough to say, "Good night, Colina."

"Good night."

Only when he was gone, Colina noticed the storm outside. She pulled the curtains against the rain and wind which sounded like handfuls of gravel thrown against the house. She drank the coffee and listened to the weather, feeling strange, moved.

For a moment, she considered going over to Francie's house to ease this sudden agitation. But not just yet.

Ewart's trousers lay folded on her bed. She picked them up and examined them. Although the knees were nearly threadbare, obviously it was the tear along the seam in the seat that he wanted mending. She fetched her sewing basket for pins and basting thread, then turned the trousers inside out to do the job properly.

A hair was stuck in the zip.

Colina regarded it with embarrassment and fascination. Obviously not a head hair, she thought, noting its

coarseness and darker colour. She left it, trying not to brush against it as she pinned the frayed seam neatly and began to baste it in preparation for the final stitching on her machine.

An all-over blush poured over her as an unbidden image came of Ewart's skin against this cloth. And his nether hairs. He would have this cloth against his skin as he hiked all over Brocks Lake and beyond, climbed the lattice towers to service generators, flew kites to site new wind turbines, hammered solar panels into place. He would wear these trousers as he sat in the food hall, full of appetite and plans and his oddball good will towards all and belief in the future.

These trousers would slide down his long legs at night when he prepared for bed. An active man radiates as much as 250 watts of heat.

She remembered his strength at play, cartwheeling in the grass in the afternoon sun, like a rogue wind angel loose from its tower.

After she had used her sewing machine, she unplugged it, put it in its case, at first just tidying up, but then she recognized that it was the first step of packing to go.

She was no longer drift-stuff.

Leigh Kennedy last appeared in *Interzone* with "The Bicycle Way" (issue 150). She is the author of the novels *The Journal of Nicholas the American* (1986) and *Saint Hiroshima* (1987), and of the story-collection *Faces* (1986). An American by birth (like so many "British" women sf writers), she lives with her husband, Christopher Priest, and their children on the Sussex coast.

HEAD SHOTS

short stories by
Keith Brooke

Head Shots – a collection of short stories

"I have read 'Beside the Sea' perhaps four or five times... It's a story I come back to again and again, and one which I wish I had written myself – and there can be no greater recommendation than that."
from the foreword by Eric Brown

Read 'Beside the Sea' and 13 other stories in a collection spanning ten years of science fiction and fantasy

Lord of Stone – a novel

Trace: a country where magic is dying out. A country at war with itself. A country where the prophecies of the Book of the World have started to come true.

Bligh: a young foreigner, drawn irresistibly to the war in Trace. A man who has rejected religion, yet appears to be possessed by one of the six Lords Elemental. Bligh thinks he's going mad, but if he is then it's a madness shared by others.

Gritty and passionate – a fantasy for the new millennium.

Back in print: *Expatria*, *Expatria Incorporated* and *Keepers of the Peace*

www.oivas.com/cosmos/web/

All titles published by Cosmos, an imprint of Wildside Press

www.keithbrooke.co.uk

A Wizard of the Vertical

Adam Roberts

interviewed by Nick Gevers

Currently in his mid-30s, Adam Roberts is a London-based academic who, in the midst of more conventional literary labours as a critic and editor of 19th-century poetry, has burst onto the stage of British science fiction with a pair of impressive high-concept novels. *Salt* (2000) is a suspenseful and quite gruelling account of cultural and ideological conflict on a colony planet, and boasts some of recent sf's most ambitious and resonant scientific symbolism; *On* (2001) is a longer and narratively surer odyssey located on a world literally turned upside down (or at least at 90 degrees.) Roberts also has produced a well-regarded summation of critical perspectives on sf, titled simply *Science Fiction* (2000); his deep knowledge of and love for the genre richly informs his creative work. He is certainly one of sf's emerging luminaries.



NG: You're a university literary academic who has gone into sf writing – a fairly unusual career profile, as most sf authors with a full-fledged academic background come from the hard or soft sciences instead. So what made you decide to take up sf?

AR: It really never occurred to me to write anything other than science fiction. What else is there? I mean, what else is there of any merit or use? I teach three things at Royal Holloway University of London: 19th-century literature (which is where my PhD was), science fiction and Postmodernism. In all three areas, and particularly the last two, the so-called "two cultures" divide between Science and Art doesn't really exist, which makes me hopeful that the whole pernicious distinction is dissolving away. But that's wishful thinking, I suppose. It still is the case that the scientists I know feel duty-bound to acculturate, to read books and listen to music and so on, where the humanities scholars I know revel in their ignorance of science. Bad, bad, bad. There were some science errors in *Salt* too, so I'm shamefaced about it myself. But I look at it this way: it's possible to come at the business of writing science fiction by concentrating on getting the science right, or by getting the fiction right – by capitalizing on the many brilliant novels written in the last 300 years, by having an awareness of the fictive, stylistic, formal elements of the writing process. My background, hopefully, gives me that, and I hope I can work on the science part as I go on, rather than doing it the other way round, which seems to me the harder job.

NG: You've published a critical volume on sf in addition to your two sf novels. How would you define, or if not define, assess the cultural function and significance of, sf? And how does your theoretical understanding of the genre inform your writing of it?

AR: To take the second question first – I think it goes the other way around; or I hope it does, because otherwise I'm writing sf to a schematic template in my head, and that's not going to work. All writers are fans in the first instance; that's what inspires us to become writers – emulation. Critics are the same. As for assessing the cultural function of sf: I recently signed a contract to write a critical history of the whole genre, from its beginnings through to the present day: 150,000 words for Palgrave, so I'm giving this a lot of thought. We all want to think our love for sf goes beyond an arrested adolescent fascination with rockets and slime, don't we: but I do think that sf is the key cultural mode today, and has been for 40 years or more. That's because sf is just the best way to

explore questions of difference; and those questions of difference – of gender difference, racial difference, cultural change and the acceleration of life – are the biggest questions of the contemporary world. Encountering difference is the most significant thing we do in our globe-culture today, and sf is fascinated with that encounter. Sometimes it seems to me that there really are, when you boil it down, only two types of novel: historical novels and sf. The English novel in particular has been stuck in the doldrums of the comfortable past for too long, endless nostalgic rehashings of Regency or 1950s codes. Jesus, where would we be without sf?

NG: Who, for you, are the most interesting sf writers, past and contemporary?

AR: I genuinely think that the best, the most exciting writing happening today is in the fields of sf and fantasy. Bear in mind that, as a university lecturer, the government pays me to read books, so this isn't just a throwaway comment – I read a lot, in all genres, and the most innovative and spot-on stuff is happening in sf. I think Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy, flawed though it is, is such an enormous achievement that it will come to be regarded, with Updike's Rabbit books and late Philip Roth, as one of the most significant literary achievements of the late 20th century. You can list every Pulitzer Prize winner, and none of them have the cultural impact or merit of *Neuromancer*. I think that writers like J.G. Ballard and Michael Moorcock did their best work when they were working unambiguously in an sf/fantasy idiom; now that they've moved to "mainstream fiction" they've lost bite. I think that in any of the mainstream sub-genres that get all the attention today sf has the boss authors. African-American literature? Octavia Butler blows Toni Morrison and Alice Walker out of the water. Fictionalizations of London? Don't give me Iain Sinclair, read China Miéville or Terry Pratchett. You want artistic explorations of Difference? Never mind Salman Rushdie or Sadie Smith – go to sf.

Yes, all right, I'm getting onto the hobbyhorse there. Let me answer the question; I can certainly name some authors that I really rate. Past authors – Wells, for his artistry and sheer technical skill as a writer, which I think gets overlooked. Philip Dick of course; Stanislaw Lem too, though more for his shorter pieces, the *Perfect Vacuum* stuff rather than *Solaris*. Jack Vance, who is simply superb. What is great about Vance is that he wrote so much, that so much of his stuff, though out of print, turns up in second-hand shops, that although I've read dozens of his novels there are dozens more to read, so I have

all that pleasure ahead of me. Ursula Le Guin: a life-changing writer. It sounds a bit wet to put it in those terms, but I genuinely think she is. Sheri Tepper; under-rated but fantastic, not only in literature-of-ideas sense, but more generally as a writer; the Marjorie Westriding trilogy in particular.

I'm conscious of the fact that the last three writers I've named as past authors are still producing. Um. But to go on to contemporary – the acid test for me is: will I buy books by these writers in hardback or will I wait until they come out in paperback? On that criterion my key writers are Christopher Priest, whom I've loved since I was a teenager, and Paul McAuley – I can't understand why McAuley isn't generally acknowledged as one of the great writers of the day. If I could write a novel as good as *Fairyland* I'd die happy.

NG: You've engaged in studies of Victorian poets, Tennyson and Browning in particular. Has this work influenced your sf in a major way?

AR: Inevitably, yes. *Salt* was in part written as dramatic monologue, based on the kinds of things Browning and Tennyson were doing: creating characters, getting them to describe their situations in their own idioms, utilizing poetic imagery to character effect and so on. I only hope that doesn't sound irredeemably pompous, but there you go. I love Victorian literature, and I love science fiction, and popular culture in particular, and I don't see a contradiction between them. In the 19th century literature was popular culture. Everybody who read, read Tennyson, Browning, Dickens and the like, from royalty and literary elites to servants, bargemen

working the Thames and so on. The division between "high literary art" that only an elite can understand, let alone appreciate, and "vulgar popular culture" that is looked down upon only comes in with the Modernists at the start of the 20th century: Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot quoting Latin and Greek and so on.

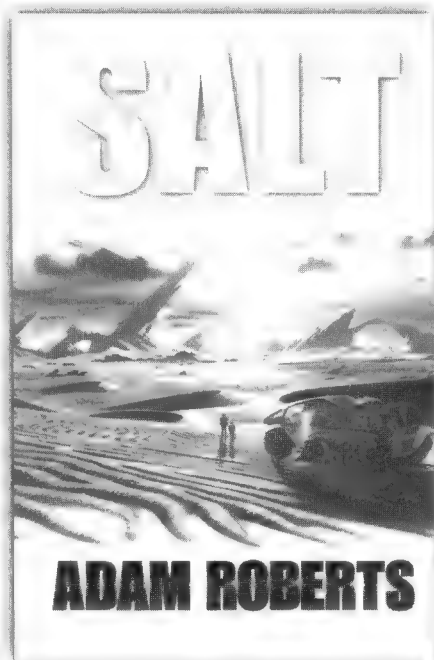
NG: You write of political conflict, of its gripping tension and its utter futility, with exceptional vividness. Why is this such a consistent focus of your writing?

AR: Politics is a human constant; humans are social animals, and the protocols that govern how we interact socially are called "politics." I suppose you could say that's part of a certain Marxist (or it'd be more to the point to say MTV Marxist) underpinning of what I write. I never really believe a person who says "I'm not a political person" – that's a contradiction in terms. As for political conflict: that's what the material dialectic is in practical terms. Ahem!

NG: You placed your first novel, *Salt*, with Gollancz, and they gave it hardcover and trade paperback publication; quite soon, some reviewers were describing you as a major new sf talent and the like. Had you written and submitted novels before *Salt*? And how difficult was your breakthrough into publication, how surprised were you (if at all) by your success?

AR: Major new sf talent? Shucks; surely not. You're making me blush.

It happened like this. I'd done the usual thing, followed the path that many readers will be familiar with, of writing unpublished and unpublishable bits and pieces, unfinished projects, this and that, for many years. I wrote a novel called *The Soul Transporters* – a very bleak little tale set on a distant planet and concerning religious intolerance, in a universe where the existence of God is an absolute, proven, scientific fact, and where "atheism" is a persecuted heretical sect who insist on the necessity of "faith," believing those things that cannot be proved (such as the non-existence of God). It was a little metaphysical, as this mini-precis implies, as well as being too short and over-glum. My agent Steven Calcutt liked it though, and set about representing it to various publishers, all of whom rejected it. This process took about a year and half: out to a publisher, a wait, and then the rejection letter. And in that period I wrote *Salt*. Eventually I got a slightly different manner of rejection note from Simon Spanton at Orion; *The Soul Transporters* wasn't commercial enough for him to take on, but he kind-of liked bits of it and was there anything else by this writer he could look at? Steve hustled me, I sent him



Salt and he sent it on to Orion without even reading it himself – I'm not sure he's read it to this day, actually. Simon liked it, bought it, and here I am. And yes I'm surprised; utterly smacked-in-the-gob every time I go into a bookshop and see a copy of my book there.

NG: Salt is mainly set on a quite intensely realized salt planet. What was it about salt – its physical and symbolic properties – that led you to make it so dominate this novel?

AR: It has so many resonances: actual, symbolic, religious, chemical. As an emblem of dialectical interaction it's a useful chemical metaphor, two very different chemicals that interact to form a third that's radically different again. I liked the way that it's simultaneously necessary for existence, and also an embodiment of sterility – sowing your defeated enemy's fields with salt, for example. There's the money element: the word "salary" derives from the Latin for salt, as every schoolchild knows. And it gets used in the Bible as a trope for the soul; ye are the salt of the earth, should the salt lose its savour where-with shall it be salted? and so on. Plus it's just very beautiful: just putting a little salt in the curve of your palm and looking at it in the sunlight; those tiny little crystals, miraculously formed and lovely as shrunken diamonds.

NG: Salt seems to be in dialogue with Frank Herbert's Dune, in various ways, from its title through its plot. Why this intriguing intertextuality?

AR: There's no getting away from intertextuality; no such thing as a novel written in isolation from other novels. I was, though, a little surprised people picked up Herbert to such a degree and assumed I was rewriting *Dune* – great book though that is. Apart from the planet-wide desert notion, and I suppose an element of war, there doesn't seem to me to be much in common between the novels – but who am I to say? The Author is Dead, as I teach our undergrads. I was, in my own mind, drawing more from Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, and from Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire*. But if people don't see it, it ain't there.

NG: Is Salt to some degree an allegory of contemporary political schisms, in particular sectarian ones?

AR: Not so much specific political sectarianism, I think, as the principle of binary political allegiances. The thing about religion getting tangled up in politics is that it teaches exclusive absolute truth, and that doesn't allow elbow-room to even start to see the other person's point of view. Of course,

there are plenty of forms of religion, over-and-above the spiritual...

NG: The main opposing ideologies in Salt are total anarchism and military-capitalist hierarchy, the latter with a religious fundamentalist gloss. Do you think any good can come from either of these political codes? In other words, could the narratives of the two systems' exemplars, Petja and Barlei, have had any more positive outcome?

AR: What I've discovered is that it's hard anticipating people's sympathies. I'd assumed the initial position of readers would be "fascism bad! anarchist society with lots of sex – better!" so that I could monkey around with those sympathies as the book went on. But this is not what I've found; people I've spoken to find the anarchists chilly and unappealing and think there's something rather comforting in the fascist state. It's the Judge Dredd problem: you create a fascist as an ironic commentary upon society, and then you discover that people actually like him. Not that I'm in the best position to gauge it – like I say, the Author is Dead. I'd rather live with the anarchists, but I'm not speaking from any privileged position.

NG: Your second novel is titled On. Why are you so wedded – rather like Stephen Baxter – to monosyllabic titles? If On has a sequel, will it be called Off?

AR: My girlfriend thinks I should spell out a sentence. You know – Salt – On – My Kipper – In the Morning – that sort of thing. The novel is called *On* because that's the first word of the book. Ancient Greek and Hebrew titles follow the same logic, and it seems to make perfect

sense to me. I could have called it *On Tighe's Eighth Birthday*, but that doesn't sound so snappy, now, does it? Of course, I reckon there's more to the title than a sort of randomness: it is a book about trying to hang on to things, about the precariousness of being balanced on the world – what holds us on? Gravity does: friend and enemy. And so on.

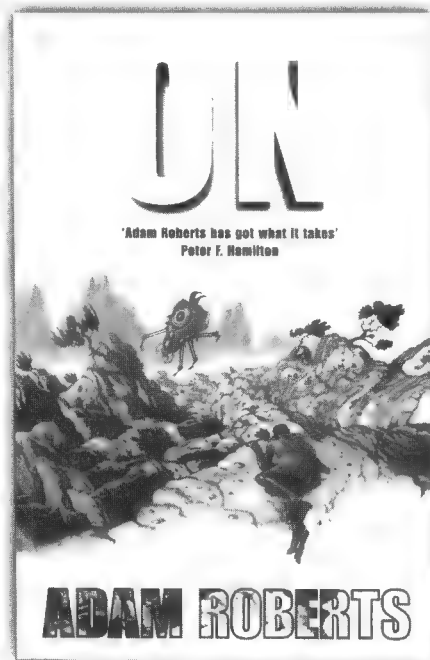
Incidentally, I've already got the first sentence to the sequel to *On*; if the first book does well enough I'll write it. "Onto the plateau, over the broad shelf, and up the haggard staircase, she ran with the desperate haste of somebody in fear of their life." I'd call it *On 2: The Plateau*.

I do like the title *Off*, though. Is it copyrighted? I imagine a novel about decay, about things going off; about the notion of death as a switching off, like a binary computer switch. That could be the governing symbolic thesis, I think: imagine taking our cultural tropes from information technology. Our culture has taken its spiritual ideas from traditional seasonal patterns; death is seen as a latency period before the rebirth of spring and so on. Information technology should change that.

NG: On is one of the few sf novels, Christopher Priest's *Inverted World* being another, that posits a state of things so unlike ours that in it people have had to adapt to fundamental alterations in the basic laws of physics. How did you conceive of the Worldwall, On's vertical and utterly precarious setting?

AR: Precariousness is the key; I wanted a world that people could literally fall off in seconds if they weren't careful. I can't remember where it started. Maybe it was reading K. W. Jeter's *Farewell Horizontal* – there's a neglected classic for you, with its peoples clinging to the side of an enormous never-explained tower. On the other hand, maybe it was just one of those ideas that floats through your brain. Actually I thought I'd chanced upon a cool new idea, but China Miéville (sorry to name-drop) tells me that there's a fantasy series set on a vertical world already out there. Don't know what it's called, but it means I can't claim originality.

I'm glad that you mention Chris Priest's *Inverted World* – a tremendous novel, which I love. I remember (to name drop again; bear with me, I'm still at the stage of being starstruck at finally getting to meet all these famous sf authors) attending a publisher's party where Chris Priest was also. Now: I revere Christ Priest; I have read everything he's ever written; when I was a teenager I pored over his novels with a frankly unhealthy obsession – *Indoctrinaire*, *Fugue For a Darkening Island*, *A Dream of Wessex*. Extraordinary, brilliant novels. He is one of the key figures in my own little develop-



ment; one of the reasons, as I say, why there was never any doubt in my mind but that science fiction was the thing to write. Real hero-worship stuff. So at this party Roger Levy and I, both first-time authors full of publishers' free wine, were nudging one another and saying "look, it's Christopher Priest," and so on. Finally we plucked up the courage and approached him, and he said something like "I think it's great for you guys, your first novels, it's a wonderful time, congratulations." And I said "bllrrghhngghbrrrr[snort]." I think I meant to say "I've always admired your work enormously, your novels have had a profound impact on my development, and I'd like to touch the sleeve of your garment in respect." But what I actually said was "bllrrghhngghbrrrr[snort]." If he remembers, he doubtless thinks I'm a bit of a prat.

NG: Is *On*, with its highly episodic structure, consciously a picaresque novel?

AR: Picaresque in the sense of being primarily narrative, yes. Narrative gets a lot of stick in academic circles – it's seen as pulp, soap-opera and Victorian-novel in a bad way. It's One Thing Happening After Another, and that's seen as limiting; most academics get excited over stylistic and formal innovations, rather than narrative ones. That's why unreadable books like *Finnegans Wake* get space on syllabuses where *Lord of the Rings*, say, doesn't. But I love narrative; it's under-theorized in criticism. *Salt* was not primarily a narrative book, it was all about voices, form, tone and so on; so I wanted to write a straight narrative. The point of doing that was to construct a line that could be disrupted radically from time to time; things would be developing such-and-such and then, bang, everything changes. Instead of the narrative going ABCD, I liked the idea of it going ABCQ; the protagonist is going along, going along, and then he falls off the world. In turn that dictates a certain episodic structure.

NG: Where *Dune* has (at least some) echoes in *Salt*, *On* seems to nod towards *The Wizard of Oz*, not least in its ubiquitous Wizard of *On*. Are you inverting L. Frank Baum's world just as you invert gravity?

AR: Hmm – I hadn't thought of that, but now you mention it, it makes a lot of sense. *ON* is *OZ* with the Z turned through 90 degrees... cool... these things can live in the subconscious, can't they? It's certainly true I agree with Gore Vidal when he says that *The Wizard of Oz* has a greater claim to being "the Great American Novel" – in the sense of having had a more seminal impact on

American consciousness and culture – than *Moby Dick* or *Gravity's Rainbow*. All Baum's *Oz* books are brilliant fantasy; I like *Return to Oz* especially. I wish I'd thought of it when I was writing *On*, actually; I would have made the protagonist a girl rather than a boy.

NG: *On*'s protagonist, Tighe, has many sterling qualities, but seems doomed to perpetual frustration. Is this simply the universal human fate, is Tighe Everyman?

AR: I like that idiom "sterling Everyman"; it has an anti-euro smack to it. Which means I ought to insist on Tighe as an ECU-Everyman – multicultural

etc. I found myself warming to him as the novel went on, actually; he becomes less passive, and more active. I suppose he's an Everyman in the sense that the novel is a science-fictionized dramatization of the shit-happens philosophy of life; roll with it, as he tends to do.

NG: What lies next for you? Are further novels in prospect?

AR: My next novel is with my editor at Orion at the moment; indeed, we're having a minor disagreement over the title. I want to call it *Dear Stone*, as in the opening of a letter to a stone; Simon thinks that a title like that would mean the book gets inadvertently shelved in the wildlife section of bookshops. He wants to call it *Stone*. I think the idea is to bill me as "Adam Roberts, you know, he does the one-word-title-novels." Disputes like this follow one trajectory: the author blusters for a little while and then agrees to everything the editor suggests. Editors are the aristos in publishing; authors are just worms. After all, editors are professionals at getting books sold, which is the point at the end of the day. Authors are only experts at posing about in the pub with their mates.

Dear Stone, as I insist on calling it at the moment, is a novel set in a galactic utopia where billions live in happiness and harmony. In the book one of the very few criminals, a statistical freak in this perfect society, is commissioned by some mysterious group to murder the population of a whole planet. He agrees to do this, but also wants to find out who is behind so monstrous a request – which is to say, in whodunnit terms, the protagonist is the murderer and also the detective trying to uncover who is behind the crime. I liked the idea of the whodunnit with that sort of twist. Plus it allows you to play games with identification and sympathy – when you're reading a novel in which your main character is trying to do something against all odds you tend to want to see that thing come to fruition, even if it is something terrible. I also wanted to have a go at a utopia; I love Iain Banks's *Culture*, but don't you feel there's something missing from his shagging-and-partying utopia? Or more strictly, I guess, it's a shagging-and-partying-with-interludes-of-violence-and-war-to-stop-existence-becoming-boring sort of place. I can well imagine that this would be the logic of a utopian society, but it might admit of a little more Aldous Huxley dyspepsia. So I've tried to do a utopian society which isn't satirically dismissive of the very idea of utopia, but also isn't merely an adolescent exercise in wish-fulfilment. I only finished writing it recently, so I'm still too close to it to know if it really works or not.



Adam Roberts with his girlfriend Rachel Cummings at the launch party for *ON*



The Fire

Zoran Zivkovic

Mrs Martha woke suddenly, jerking up on her elbows. But that did not immediately dispel the dream; it lingered a while, like a frightful echo. At least, the sound did. The image quickly dissolved from under her lowered eyelids into the darkness of the bedroom, but her ears were still filled with music. It was so powerful, it certainly should have wakened Constantine, even though he was a very sound sleeper. But her husband's large shape remained immobile. He was lying on his side, with his back to her, like a dark landmass. She stared at him in bewilderment, slowly waking up, as the music started to fade, giving way to his deep, noisy breathing, on the edge of snoring.

She looked around, still confused, feeling her heart thud hollow in her breast. It must be quite early. The large rectangular window was filled with a mute, pre-dawn greyness. From somewhere outside came the barking of a dog, and another bark from further off came in reply. She turned to the bedside table. The large, bright yellow numbers on the alarm clock said 04:47. She squinted at them for several moments, then got up, searched around her bed for her slippers and headed for the bathroom, tottering a little.

She drained a large glassful of water. As she drank the last gulps she realized it was not what she wanted. She wasn't the least bit thirsty. As she lowered the glass to the washstand she caught her reflection in the mirror. She stared at her face in the striplights, filled with dis-

belief, as though looking at some stranger rather than herself. Finally she shook her head, turned off the light and went back to bed.

It was going to be hard to go back to sleep, which was regrettable because she would feel sleepy and out of sorts all day long; but on balance she was glad, because she didn't feel at all like going back to sleep and to that dream. There was, however, no retreating from the dream. Lying on her back, with the covers pulled up to her chin, staring at the ceiling where pale stripes had started to appear, she tried to concentrate on something ordinary, something innocuous, that would calm her. But her thoughts would not obey her. Something seemed to be pulling them, taking them back to the dream.

She was standing in the middle of a vast, sandy wilderness. Low on the horizon, the sun wrapped the sand in a reddish veil. A gentle breeze was raising little whirlwinds that danced around her bare feet, tickling between her toes. She was wearing a loose, long-sleeved, calf-length white dress resembling Bedouin garb. She felt comfortable in it, though the fabric was rough.

Suddenly she heard the sound of waves, faint but quite recognizable. She turned inquisitively, but could not see the sea, as she had hoped. Instead, she caught sight of a lone hill behind her. It resembled the shell of a giant turtle that had pulled itself up to end its days in the desert. A huge stone building – a temple, perhaps? – stood on its

flat top, like some sort of cubical hump, surrounded by a row of stumpy columns.

A procession was slowly making its way up the left curve of the hill towards the temple. Tall figures wearing robes similar to hers, but dark brown in colour and with hoods raised, stood out sharply against the deep blue afternoon sky. Each of them carried an object which she did not recognize at once. At first she thought they were a detachment of soldiers carrying strange weapons of various shapes and sizes, but when she looked more closely she saw that they were actually carrying musical instruments. The musicians were on their way to the temple, probably to give a concert there.

How wonderfully propitious! Constantine, unlike herself, was not an admirer of serious music, so they rarely went to concerts. Here was a chance to make up a little for what she had missed, since he, for some reason, was nowhere in sight. She rushed towards the hill, her feet sinking ankle deep now and then in the soft sand. When she reached the foot of the hill, the last of the musicians were disappearing into the temple. The slope was not gentle, but she climbed effortlessly, feeling the smooth, warm stones under her feet.

A surprise awaited her at the top. There was no door where she was sure she had seen the musicians entering the building. Instead there was a flat yellow wall of massive stone blocks, faded from long exposure to the sun. An inscription was written across the four columns spaced along the entire lateral facade, but she was unable to read it as she didn't know Greek.

She rushed to the right along a cobbled path, in search of the entrance. She went all around the rectangular temple but could find no opening, except for a row of slits at the very top of the long sides of the building, probably serving to admit light. Certainly, only a bird could enter there. Returning to her starting point, she stopped in confusion, not knowing what to do. The concert might start at any moment and she was very keen not to miss it.

As if to confirm her apprehensions, music started to pour out of the temple. It came from high up, probably through the light holes. At first she was frustrated at having been unable to enter the building in time, but then, quite unexpectedly, another feeling displaced her exasperation. Her soul was filled with anxiety, although she didn't understand what was causing it. The sounds from inside grew steadily stronger over several long moments, before she realized that they were actually what was upsetting her.

There was something deranged about the sounds. She couldn't determine exactly what it was, but she was overcome by a strange certainty that something in addition to music was issuing from the instruments of those hooded figures who had magically passed into the doorless temple. Whatever it was, it was as intangible as the sounds, but by no means innocuous. Spurred by a dark premonition, she ran towards the long side of the building. One look at the light slits was enough to confirm her fears. Tongues of flame were darting from the narrow windows.

She was panic-stricken. The fire could not harm the thick stone walls, but something much more inflammable

was inside the building, and it was now in danger. She did not wonder what it might be, nor how she knew of it – none of that mattered now, and she could think about it later. First she had to find a way to put out the blaze. She was the only one around to do it.

Yes, but how? She set her mind feverishly to work, biting her lower lip as she always did in times of great tension. She needed water. Where could she find water in the desert? And then she remembered the waves she had heard while down in the flatland. A quick survey of the landscape surrounding the hilltop was enough; there, indeed, was the sea, its blue surface dotted with foamy white crests.

It wasn't far, just a short walk away, but for her needs the sea might as well have been infinitely distant. Even had the temple been built right on the shore, there was nothing she could do. How would she carry the water to extinguish the fire? All she had were her cupped hands.

As if mocking her helplessness, the music and the fire grew louder and stronger. Flames were now flickering wildly out of the openings at the top of the wall, forcing her to step back from the heat to the very edge of the hill's flat top. The music had grown so loud, she had to put her hands over her ears. This did not help much. The ground around her soon started to shake, clearly from the force of the vibrations, first slowly and then with greater and greater intensity, as if in the grip of an earthquake. She lost her balance for a moment and fell to her hands and knees, but managed not to plunge down the hillside.

Horror seized her, as she saw that even the stone temple could not resist the destructive impact of the music. Completely deafened, she watched mesmerized as the columns swayed and toppled into cylindrical segments. One of them started to roll towards her, but all she could do was stare at it, unable to move. It passed so close it almost grazed her, then continued down the steep slope, picking up speed as it went.

For a moment she hoped that it was all over; then the heavy stone roof collapsed into the interior of the building with a tremendous crash, causing pandemonium. She felt not the slightest compassion for the musicians, who were presumably crushed beneath. It served them right. It was all their fault. Without their demonic music none of this would have happened. But the music didn't stop. It could still be heard rising from the fiery ruins, even louder now when there was no roof to dampen the sound; the collapse had hindered the musicians not the slightest.

The fire was now reaching high into the sky. She was overcome with deep despair when it became clear that there was no way to save the delicate, fragile thing somewhere inside. She still didn't know what it was, but nothing could survive such infernal flames. It had been lost, inexorably and forever, leaving behind an emptiness as gaping as the tomb. She had not been able to do a thing, and now it was too late.

It was also too late for her to get away. The wall, with its large stone blocks, started to swell like an inflatable balloon. Only a few more moments and it would yield before the incomprehensible pressure from within. Suddenly she realized she had no shelter. There was not even

time to flee headlong down the hillside. All she managed to do, as the sounds rushed inexorably toward their demented crescendo, was to raise her hands instinctively to her face and close her eyes tight. Darkness swallowed the terrifying sight, but nothing was able to drive away the final explosion of music.

Mrs Martha did manage to fall asleep again, but not until broad daylight. This time there were no dreams. She simply sank into a lake of black ink that absorbed her into its blind, deaf sanctuary. She could have stayed there a very long time, but Constantine didn't let her. He reached for her, gently shook her shoulder, and pulled her to the surface. She tried to resist, not wanting to come up, but he was merciless.

Her dream remained behind, in the inky lake. She hadn't the slightest memory of it after waking up the second time that morning. When her husband asked why she had overslept, she answered with a shrug. It seemed odd to her, too. She was usually the first one up. She was vaguely aware of some sort of anxiety, but even though she tried to discover its cause, it remained unfathomable.

At breakfast, when Constantine put slices of fresh toast on the table, she glanced with hostility at the striped surface. She liked toast, but for some reason didn't feel like any today. Her husband gave her an inquiring look, seeing her push the empty plate away, but said nothing. She drank a full cup of coffee, blowing at it even though it wasn't hot. She knew she would have trouble with it on an empty stomach, but could still not eat a thing.

When they left for work, Constantine turned on the car radio. He had been doing this regularly for a long time, although he wasn't very interested in music. It was the best way to alleviate the strained silence that would otherwise engulf them during the half-hour ride. After more than 20 years of living together they were running out of topics for conversation. This had bothered her at first, but later she had got used to it, and even come to like it. Better to talk when they truly had a reason instead of by force of convention. She, too, was not always in a mood to talk.

Now, however, her hand reached out; first she turned the music down, although it wasn't loud, then she turned it all the way off. She said nothing while doing it, and afterward she could not have said why she had done it. The radio was tuned to a station specializing in light instrumental music that she had always enjoyed before. This morning it seemed somehow irritating, although she would not have been able to explain why. Constantine turned his head briefly towards her. She endured his inquisitive look, thankful that he did not ask her anything. They continued driving in silence, the traffic around them growing denser as they approached the city centre. When they got close to the library where Mrs Martha worked, her attention was drawn to something that she would probably not have noticed before. Two fire trucks were trying unsuccessfully to make their way through the multitude of cars inching forward in the morning rush-hour traffic. Their sirens were blaring and their blue lights were flashing, but to little effect. The cars in front

of them simply had nowhere to go to let them pass.

Mrs Martha suddenly became anxious and started to breathe rapidly, as she always did in such circumstances. The thought that the huge red vehicles might not get where they were needed in time filled her with unusual discomfort. She had no idea where fire had broken out, but that did not seem to matter. Regardless of what was burning, the damage would be enormous. Fire left an utter wasteland behind it, and this might be threatening something truly unique, something that could never be recreated.

The fire trucks turned left at the first intersection and drove out of sight. Their sirens could still be heard for a while, until they were gradually drowned out by the surrounding noise. As though emerging from a daze, Mrs Martha wondered confusedly why this was having such an effect on her. Fires happened every day in large cities such as this. That was inevitable – just as it was inevitable that many people ended their lives every day, people who were also unique and could never be recreated. But one should not allow oneself to be overly burdened with the irretrievable losses of every day; that would turn life into a real inferno.

Before she got out of the car in front of the library, Mrs Martha kissed Constantine – just a light touch of the lips that seemed barely more intimate than a handshake. They didn't say anything to each other, there was no need. He, as every morning, would drive on to the insurance company where he had worked for almost a quarter of a century. At the end of the working day he would wait for her at this same place. Then they would kiss again, without a word. The radio would already be on in the car, freeing both of them from the obligation to talk about the arid monotony of their daily working lives.

As soon as she turned on the computer in her office, as she did every morning, she realized that something was wrong. A picture appeared immediately on the screen. That should not have happened; it always took about half a minute for the system to boot up. During that time a rapid sequence of vertical text filled with sundry abbreviations, signs and numbers would pass across the screen. They moved far too fast for her to read and their meaning had never interested her; she understood very little about computers. She could find her way around the basic library program, and that was quite enough for her. She hadn't the slightest desire to learn in more detail how the thing worked.

Now it looked as if she had turned on a television set. The picture was not the computer's usual coarse representation, which she had never liked; it was a very high resolution picture of the outside of an ancient building. She stared at it in confusion. It seemed vaguely familiar, yet she could not recall where she had seen it before. Four large columns ran at regular intervals along the facade, and between the two at the centre stood an imposing rectangular entrance, its double doors wide open.

Above the columns was some sort of inscription. She moved her head a bit closer to the screen to get a better look, but this was not necessary. As if in response to her

wishes, the camera started to zoom in on the carved letters. The letters were in Greek, but still she managed to read them. For some reason this did not surprise her very much. It was certainly the lesser of the two wonders confronting her just then. The second had to do with the inscription itself. Although it was most certainly impossible, she nonetheless could clearly read: Great Library.

She stared in momentary disbelief at the letters. Then she came to her senses, realizing she should do something. She had to call someone – maybe the computer maintenance department. This was certainly some kind of breakdown. These machines went on the blink from time to time, although she had never heard of anything like this before. She reached for the telephone, but didn't finish because that same moment the camera came back to life. It glided down from the inscription, went to the open door and floated inside.

Not much could be seen at first. The only light came from a row of slits near the top of the long lateral walls, but this was not enough after the bright sunlight outside. When the picture quickly started getting lighter, Mrs Martha thought her eyes were becoming accustomed to the gloom, although she knew it was only an illusion. The camera was adjusting to the weak light. Then it started to rotate, slowly revealing the interior.

There was only one large space, resembling a hall. Its central part contained a row of wooden tables surrounded by simple chairs without backs, stretching all the way to the far end. The tables were placed in such a way as to catch the rays of light slanting from the high openings. That was enough to read by without straining one's eyes during the day, particularly if it was sunny. There did not seem to be any artificial light. There were no oil lamps or candles. Nothing that would burn. The Great Library clearly could not be used at night.

All four walls were completely covered with deep shelves, from floor to ceiling. Ladders were placed at frequent intervals. They were connected to the shelves, giving access to their upper reaches. There were things on the shelves that Mrs Martha did not immediately recognize. Having expected books, she stared in bewilderment at the tube-shaped objects that formed a vast honeycomb all around.

And then it dawned on her. If the inscription above the entrance were to be believed, there could be no conventional books here. It was too early for bound books. Documents were written on papyrus when this building existed. On the screen in front of her stretched an enormous repository for scrolls. She had never been good at making rough calculations, but she could not be mistaken here. Along the walls were thousands and thousands of scrolls.

It was an impressive sight; the first thing that crossed Mrs Martha's mind when she realized what she was looking at, however, was quite practical. As someone who was proud of her profession of librarian, she couldn't resist wondering how it was possible to find one's way about this multitude when there were not even spines to help distinguish one papyrus from another. How could someone quickly find the desired scroll among the countless

others that looked the same?

As if following her thoughts once again, the camera moved up close to one section of a shelf. The screen was now filled with only some 50 scrolls. Suddenly they were covered by a porous network of letters. This time they were in the Roman alphabet so Mrs Martha no longer had to count on a miracle in order to read them. It also did not take her long to realize what it was all about. After all, she had spent her whole life cataloguing books.

Authors' names were written in somewhat larger yellow letters and under them, in smaller blue letters, were the titles. It wasn't clear whether they referred to the works contained in the few scrolls currently visible in the background, but if this were true then the total contents of the papyrus rolls was significantly greater than she might have guessed. What an incredible treasure was to be found in the Great Library! Mrs Martha's breath grew shorter for the second time that morning.

The camera glided smoothly to the next section of the shelf. The catalogue disappeared, but a new one soon took its place. This time Mrs Martha concentrated on the text. She combed through her memory but could not recall ever having encountered some of the names written on the screen. She tried from the inventory of works to figure out who the authors might be – literary writers, historiographers, natural scientists, mathematicians – but was not certain of anything.

And then she saw a name she recognized. Her own library had recently received a new edition of his tragedies which she herself had placed on the shelves. She well remembered that only a small number of this author's works had been preserved, only seven or eight, and yet before her ran a much longer list. She counted 36 dramas. Owing to the small letters she had to count by drawing her finger across the screen. When she passed over a title, its light blue colour immediately darkened.

Led by a sudden thought, she raised her index finger to the screen again and placed it on one of the titles that did not seem familiar to her. The letters first changed shade, and then a moment later the catalogue page disappeared and one of the scrolls started to come out of the shelf. When it was all the way out, the scroll unrolled, covering the screen completely. Before Mrs Martha was the original text of a long-lost tragedy.

The instincts of an experienced librarian hushed her mounting excitement. She had to try to do something. That was uppermost in her mind. All the rest could wait for a more suitable moment – all the disturbing questions that were trying to pour out of where she had tucked them away for the time being. Yes, but how? What should she do to save this invaluable treasury that had somehow surfaced from the depths of oblivion? She thought it over carefully, but all that came to her mind was to resort to the customary way of recording data on the computer. She didn't think it would work, but what else could she do?

The moment she touched the first key on the keyboard, the papyrus scroll rolled back up and returned to its place in the honeycomb. Mrs Martha jerked her hand back as though scalded. She had made a mistake. There

was no chance to try anything else because the camera suddenly moved back from the bookshelf and withdrew to the furthest end of the room, high up under roof; now it showed the entire Great Library, with the brightly lighted entrance at the other end.

Nothing moved for several moments, as though the screen held a photograph. And then the speakers, which had been silent until then, came to life. The music they started to emit was barely audible at first, as though coming from outside, from a distance, so she did not recognize it right away. When the sound began to increase, however, Mrs Martha felt an icy shiver crawl up her spine. Streaming out of the inky lake where it had lain submerged, the forgotten dream slapped her violently in the face. She knew who she would see even before the procession of musicians reached the entrance. Lit from behind, the hooded figures began to slide inside like faceless ghosts, as if not touching the ground. When they left the bright rectangle at the door, they melted completely into the surrounding darkness. Their presence could only be discerned by the music that never stopped. When the last musician entered the Great Library, the tall double doors closed soundlessly behind him, leaving no trace that they had existed.

For a while nothing moved again on the almost totally black screen. Coming from now invisible sources, the music rose ominously. Then bright spots started to speckle the deep shadows. Several moments passed before Mrs Martha realized what was happening. Torches were being lit one by one, gradually illuminating the spacious interior. What these smoking, flickering lights revealed seemed impossible. The torches were floating in mid air, without any support; no one was holding them. There was no sign of the musicians, although the music still thundered.

Once all the torches were alight, they took up positions evenly distributed round the large building, forming a long rectangle along the walls. Mrs Martha gripped the edge of the desk in front of her, as if afraid of losing her footing. She stared fixedly at the screen. She was perfectly aware of what was to come, but the powerlessness she had felt in her dream tied her hands in her waking state as well. Although she feverishly tried to think of a way to prevent the inevitable, nothing crossed her mind.

The torches stood motionless next to the shelves for a moment. Then, as if at some inaudible command, commenced their demented feast. Like the flaming paintbrushes of a many-handed, crazed painter, they started to dip and sway over the papyrus base. The huge fresco was covered with flickering, flaming colours. Mrs Martha bit almost through her lower lip, as though sharp pain could release her from this unwanted dream. But this time no awakening could save her.

She watched in despair as the fiery orgy gobbled up the scrolls one after the other, reducing their immensely valuable contents to nothingness. Accompanied by the deranged music, the fire quickly gained momentum and finally occupied the screen completely. The image of the raging fire was so convincing that Mrs Martha thought she could feel its heat on her face. The burning smell that

seemed to fill her nostrils was even more intense. And then she saw with horror that this was not just an illusion: somewhere from the back of the monitor rose a ribbon of grey smoke.

She almost jumped off her chair, knocking it over behind her. Her hands flew to her mouth, but not fast enough to suppress the cry that escaped. The smoke in front of her became thicker, then turned reddish, and finally mixed with the flames that started to stream upwards. Mrs Martha should have known how to cope with such a situation, she had been trained and knew what she must do, but she was completely paralysed. She stared dully at the fire as it engulfed the whole monitor. By some miracle, the picture was still there, so the two fires now seemed to merge into one, while music still poured out of the speakers.

When water suddenly gushed from above, Mrs Martha did not even try to get out of the way. Smoke had activated the sprinkler system and water started to shower from innumerable little holes in the ceiling. She stood under this dense, piercing shower, her eyes still riveted to the screen, by now empty. The speakers were also silent. The room's power supply had automatically shut down the moment the sprinklers started to work. Like every modern library, this one was properly guarded against the greatest threat to books since time immemorial.

Mrs Martha spent the next two and a half hours wrapped in a blanket in the ladies' room, waiting for her clothes to be dried and ironed. When she returned to her office everything had been wiped up and put in order. She did not have to explain anything. No one even asked her what had happened, since it was quite obvious. Monitors had caught fire before. It was just an unpleasant incident without too much damage. In any case, everything was insured. A new monitor was already waiting on her desk, but she did not turn her computer back on that day.

Late in the afternoon when she got into the car and kissed Constantine, she was briefly tempted to tell him what had happened, but held back. She would only get mixed up trying to explain something that she herself did not understand. In addition, he was even less in a mood to talk on the way home from work than in the morning. The drained expression on his face clearly said as much. Finally, the radio was already turned on. Without exchanging a single word, they joined the dense flow of traffic.

Translated from the Serbian by Alice Copple-Tosic
Translation edited by Christopher Gilmore

Copyright © 2001 by Zoran Zivkovic

Zoran Zivkovic lives in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, where he runs a small publishing company named Polaris. He previously appeared in *Interzone* (from issue 152 to issue 161) with a cycle of six stories collectively entitled *Impossible Encounters* – and so published as a little book in his native land. The above new piece is the second in another cycle of subtly interconnected fantasies – *Seven Touches of Music*. The stories may be read in any order.



MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe

In his declining years, Jones was an eccentric and largely forgotten figure in archaeological circles. Following his final excavation report *Indiana Jones and the Underpants of God*, his teaching position was not renewed; and after a series of disastrous seasons in which he claimed to have discovered a succession of Mesoamerican lost cities that thereupon variously collapsed, flooded, or sank into the ground, together with his excavation teams, funding dried up and his publications became increasingly theoretical. Supported primarily by film consultancies and by private patronage from sympathetic amateur collectors such as the O'Connell and Croft families in England, he developed a revisionist model of ancient history according to which the main activity of early civilizations was not the emergence of economic systems or the development of urbanization, but the construction of cyclopean mechanical puzzles on cryptoastronomical principles to house collectable *objets* charged with wondrous cosmic powers

of plotting. A rambling memoir, *It's Not a Girl's Name It's a Dog's Name* was privately printed, but most copies were destroyed when the warehouse was vaporized, allegedly by a 40-foot toad-demon raised by Nazi Egyptologists in the service of Satan. No body was ever found. – *Who Was Who in American Archaeology*, Millennium Edition with Apocrypha

But now it turns out there was a piece of the puzzle that even the master tomb raider was unable to collect, and which has lain undiscovered until the groundbreaking researches of Croft *filles*. Notwithstanding its generally frugal recourse to the devices of reason, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* has one big idea – indeed, its one idea larger than a dried legume: the union of classical stunt archaeology with the mummy of all conspiracy theories, combining astro-archaeology, time paradox, the Illuminati and even the Tunguska event in a single (surprisingly dull) master plot. Even Dr Jones himself never quite put the pieces

together: why seemingly-unconnected ancient sites all over the globe conform to the size and shape of the Bond stage at Pinewood; why their contents follow a near-identical pattern of sliding slabs activated by recessed switches, still fully-functional after millennia of disrepair; why so many cosmic McGuffins were split into collectable pieces and housed in prominent pedestal settings guarded by armies of stone warriors who come to life at a touch. The answer, it transpires, is that *all human history* is part of one and the same millennia-old conspiracy run by the Illuminati to throw the mother of all switches when the cosmic clockwork aligns. “Tonight,” as Lady Lara explains, “Pluto and Neptune align with Yooranus!” And the effect of the cosmic machine is to validate the whole tomb-raiding practice in which self-styled freelance antiquaries demolish Buddhas with Taleban zeal and dynamite whole Asian temple complexes in order to make off with a single portable artefact without an export

licence. For there's more at stake than just heritage politics here: "The triangle gives its possessor the power of God to move back and forth through time, *undo the past*." In other words, it's necessary to desecrate history in order to save it, and what looks like wanton destruction and privateering is all in the good cause of saving the past for the future.

How far *Tomb Raider* works as any kind of film of *Tomb Raider* the game is more doubtful. Mildly iconic though the chiselled polygons of her ladyship's digital pout and gel-cups may be for the occasional cover shoot and Lucozade ad, the special intensity of the bond between Lara and her consumers has always resided in the adrenalin-fuelled flow activity of real-time virtual puppeteering. The *Lara* film franchise has obviously taken a huge gamble in betting that the character and environment are interesting enough in themselves to entertain a audience by passive spectacle alone. It's hard to complain about Angelina Jolie, who wisely isn't given too much proper acting to mess up, and makes an impressive meal of the physical work. But as the Illuminati themselves admit, there's no guarantee such untamed power can ever be harnessed by ordinary human reason. "We're working from clues based on outdated cosmological models – pre-dating Aristotle"; and there are certainly moments when the modern western mind has some trouble accommodating the ancient wisdom of the pre-Aristotelian plotting on display. (In what sense is Siberia "the opposite end of the earth" from Cambodia? How does her ladyship run Hatfield House on a staff of two? Come to that, what gentlewoman's gentleman would call his employer by her first name and say things like "Holy Shit!?")

But this is cinema for the post-cinematic generation, and all notions of character, logic, and narrative motivation have accordingly been stripped right down to their vest and rucksack. No effort has been expended to give the fleshly Lara any kind of life – she just spends her days between action excavations doing what the British aristocracy apparently do, which is wander round cavernous halls in bad lighting and work out on android assassins in the games room. Like the *Mummy* films, it tries hard to reinvigorate its flabby genre with new kinds of spectacle, and it's clear that Simon West and team have at least looked thoughtfully at ways in which cinema can borrow from the distinctive stuntsmanship of the 3D corridor game, with its freer use of vertical space, jumping routines, and problem-solving sequenced action. One innova-

tion of which I suspect we'll be seeing many knock-offs is the strongly aerialistic tendency of the major set pieces, with ancient subterranean chambers conveniently equipped with a liberal dangle of creepers, chains, and other bungeeable features for Cirque du Soleil-style rope stunts. But whether that'll be enough to reclaim the future of cinema from the button-pushers is going to be for history to decide.

Back in the digital world, there's no such anxiety of fidelity for *Shrek*, which rips up William Steig's gleeful picture book and pastes the title on to an unrelated project with an agenda all its own. Steig's original kid-pleaser celebrated ugliness and scarification in the person of a hideous youth sent out into the world by his enthusiastically repulsive parents to seek his fortune, spread frightfulness about, and settle down to live horribly ever after with a princess as gruesome as himself; the end. But by the time this has been digested and expelled out the other end of the DreamWorks process, ugliness is just beauty that hasn't had enough therapy, and Shrek himself is a grumpy green giant with a heart of gold on a reluctant quest in a villain-driven, romance-plot whose slender *raison d'être* is a raft of wink-wink jokes of uneven hilarity about fairy tales and fairy-tale movies.

A quite snappy and amusing first half overcomes some rather miss-and-hit dialogue, gags, characterization, and set pieces to disarm resistance and lull the viewer into the delusion that the film will at least respect the original Shrek's complete ease with himself and his gruesomeness. But in the DreamWorks dreamworld, psy-



choburble and sentimentality can only be kept at bay so long, and sure enough the first character in cinema to be actually comfortable with deformity (well, aside from Angelina and her weirdly misshapen lips) inexorably turns out to be merely in need of some probing therapy for deep-buried low self-esteem. "What are you blocking?" asks Donkey shrink. "They judge me before they even know me," coughs up Shrek. "That's why I'm better off alone." And before he can have his heart's desire, he has to open up ("You're so wrapped up in layers, onion boy, that you're afraid of your own feelings"), or else it'll be another round of Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah chorus featuring the vocal stylings of Mr John Cale. Ha ha ha ha! Who's the scary ogre now?

Simply as a chapter in the digital-animation revolution, *Shrek* feels about 18 months behind the times. The golden-age illustrated look was an attractive idea, but it's a look that doesn't digitise easily; with the notable exception of the beautifully-executed Donkey, the textures still look artificial, the characters move

Facing page: Angelina Jolie as Lara Croft: *Tomb Raider*. Above: *Shrek* – (left to right) Donkey (Eddie Murphy), Shrek (Mike Myers), Princess Fiona (Cameron Diaz) and Lord Farquaad (John Lithgow). Below: *Shrek* – Princess Fiona has a secret she is keeping from the ogre Shrek





like Poser puppets, and the human extras are surprisingly poorly-rendered. Its novelty of appeal is more in the material, which in common with earlier DreamWorks animations (especially *Prince of Egypt*) bears the heavy pawprints of producer Jeffrey Katzenberg, not just in its stalker obsession with Disney but in its incongruously earnest allegory of pogrom – with the isolationist Shrek drawn reluctantly in by the plight of the wee folk herded into cattletrucks for transport to his swampland ghetto by jack-booted supremacist persecutors. (“I’m not a monster,” the evil Farquaad tells the torture victim: “you are – you and the rest of your fairy-tale trash poisoning my perfect world.”)

Yet despite all the fluffy liberalism of theme and ideology, there are times when *Shrek* seems to be using the animated medium to get away with things that would come over pretty whiffy in the cold light of live action. I’m surprised there hasn’t been a Jar-Jar-style outcry over the Eddie Murphy donkey sidekick, which throws a veil of animation over a kind of capering servility and shit-eating grins that human comedians of colour have put gratefully behind them. And Cameron Diaz’s princess fares little better; only

in animation can you still tame feisty kickboxing heroines by hoisting them over your shoulder (“Hey! put me down!”), to say nothing of making hilarious family fun of restricted growth, blindness, and the disabled victims of state torture. True, it side-steps the obvious cheesy ending for the slightly less cheesy second most obvious, which is probably as radical as anyone has a right to expect. But the message is still that if you’re single, ugly, and contented your only hope is in being told you’re not, and that if you’re a short-arse you’re probably a Nazi.

Amid these dispatches from the cutting edge of digital narrative, it’s quite bold of Ivan Reitman’s *Evolution* to defy its title by retrogressing to an earlier age of cinema altogether. The effects may be state of the digital art, but the film they serve is a middle-aged comedy-with-a-capital-C for people nostalgic for a time when genres were genres and you knew what kind of a film you were watching by whether it had aliens or bottom gags or both, unlike this frightful postmodern stuff where everything is ironically parasitical on everything else. It has a neatly purposed central idea in the alien biosperm that evolves over the timespan of a comedy screenplay into ever higher, smarter, bigger, and more cinematic forms of bug-eyed nasty, staving off tedium by confronting our heroes with a succession of escalating nemeses until the big finale where it conveniently coalesces into one big splatterable hyperorganism. Sadly, though, the fun doesn’t escalate at any similar rate, relying instead on a stock of standard alien-rampage set pieces

in which the invaders crash the mall, the country club, the pearl-ladies’ tea party, and generally go Jurassic on everyone’s uptown ass.

The crittermation, it must be said, is mostly excellent, and it’s just a shame that the human action isn’t even on the same landmass – with Julianne Moore’s all-thumbs boffin particularly depressing fare, appropriating Preston Sturges’s golden rule of comedy that “a pratfall is better than anything” in the hope that it’ll still work if you read “better than nothing.” Screen authors should also be warned on *no account* to resort, however great their desperation, to endings where the hero and heroine sneak off from the awards ceremony to make out; and that it’s a good 15 years since anyone last succeeded in whipping up team enthusiasm for the cast by means of a funky drive-along theme song. The satire is dentureless (“Those little germs are the living embodiment of the American dream!”), the tosh science (“Their DNA has *ten base pairs!*”) at best weakly amusing (“Geology is not an exact science”), and the slackness of plotting at times surreal, notably in a bizarre scene where our heroes are apparently able to sue the US military in the Page, AZ, county court for loss of screentime-related earnings. It’s amazing how our primitive ancestors were able to make films like this that still work perfectly today, when with our advanced digital technology we can’t figure out the source of their power or even how the pieces fit together, no matter how carefully we line up the stars. Somebody badly needs to write the hints book.

Nick Lowe

Evolution: top left, David Duchovny as Ira. Below: Allison (Julianne Moore, left) and Ira (David Duchovny, right) help Harry (Orlando Jones) deal with the worst kind of alien invasion



Three Gods

Gregory Benford

Alpha went first, as befitted the older god. Not that he was the brightest.

He (the older was always a he, though among gods the distinction was purely nostalgic) chose the world circling closer in to the young, brimming sun.

The contest began between the three of them, in peacock pride.

At first it was easy work. Alpha was of course a lesser god, like Beta and Gamma, and so had diminished powers. He could not create a whole planet from scratch, making elements in stars cook to the right ratio of masses. That had to come from Omega.

And to each of the planets the three were to cultivate, Omega would finally come, to judge.

So Alpha took the inner planet, already simmering with its birth energies. He huffed and puffed and forced from its rocks outgassing water, carbon dioxide and lava. The lava was for show, and because Alpha had to have something to watch in the long slow churn of time a world took to bake out.

Into the ever-denser air of Alpha's World (he always named them for himself) gushed torrents of thick vapour. And from the new sun lanced down fingers of golden glow, warming the gases.

The mass of Alpha's World was a given, set by Omega. Its compression fed huge energies, the exuberance of warm youth. This matched Alpha's own physical manifestation – a prickly plasma, swirling with sparks. His magnetic fingers worked incessantly, a playing phosphorescence.

Alpha loved the vortex storms that raged across his world, the vast tornadoes that eroded away the fresh, vol-

canic mountain chains. Huge slabs of rock rose and the heavy mantle of gnawing gas ground them down.

At the very top of the cloud decks, the water vapour thickened until the miracle of life sprang forth – suddenly, in Alpha's quickened, eon-leaping time sense. Molecule met molecule in organic embrace. Some liked their bonds, and made more. Soon whole organisms spawned in the lofting currents of the simmering atmosphere.

He yearned to see the vast decks of water condense into ponds, lakes, seas. And at first great banks of steam roiled across the face of his world, bringing a ferocious sting to the rocks. Cycles fed, circled, built.

But in the march of eons, the spongy, ever-warmer air sopped up the vapour as it trembled into drops, fell, and was eaten anew by the ferocious thirst of carbon dioxide.

Alpha laboured. He brought soft rains from low clouds, and gratifying ponds shimmered beneath the crash and fizz of vast lightning. Alpha cupped pressures around these, to conjure up deeper lakes... but overhead, the blanket of gases sopped up the falling droplets, sucked away molecules from the lapping waves.

For as water was always a-building, so was carbon dioxide. The two ancient enemies warred.

And just above the brimming tiny cells of new life, the jabbing rays of the sun forked into the sleepy water layers. The ultraviolet hammer fell upon those molecules, sputtering away the light hydrogen, leaving the hungry oxygen to wander.

Oxygen found slabs of rock, and was eaten. Slabby silicon digested it.

Hydrogen – always flighty, seldom sincere – frolicked

away into the vacuum of space. Alpha watched it blow off, oblivious, and fumed... which added again to his world's smouldering fires. For carbon dioxide cloaked the skies now, its blanket keeping in the heat.

Alpha's few muddy lakes lasted longest. First his ponds evaporated into the thirsty thickness above. He wept as the last great lake dwindled, fumed – and vanished.

The rule of carbon now descended. Volcanoes still belched water, but the sun broke the young molecules on its ultraviolet anvil. Carbon and its oxides the star ignored. So banks of it built and built and built. Each new carbon dioxide trapped more heat from below, and Alpha's world began to bake out.

Furious, Alpha raged across his world. His intemperate outbursts only worsened the heat. The murky air caught more infrared and cooked the rocks to a smouldering incandescence. Runaway greenhouse. Lead melted and ran on through sulphurous valleys.

Chemistry laughed at Alpha's rages.

Beta was smug.

Her slow, cool energies condensed around the outer of the three rocky worlds. If Alpha's fate was forced by two facts – size of the planet, and distance from the newborn star – only one sufficed for Beta.

She manifested as lacy liquids, great calm masses. Her presence brought a slow, gracious dance to the play of molecules and time.

Wrapped in her condensing clouds, Beta's fresh globe of shifting rubble was much smaller than Alpha's. She thought this a fine fact, for then it would not belch forth so much gas, could not grow the coat of carbon oxides that trapped heat.

Or so she thought. She was busy with her mountains, thrusting up great peaks that roared forth their bounty. These she always loved, playing in the fiery streams of lava, percolating from them just the right recipe for an atmosphere that would, of course, be cool and serene.

At first, all worked well. Ponds formed, then lakes, and all joined into great basins of muddy wealth. The air above thickened into a useful cloak, trapping enough heat to keep the lakes from scumming over with ice.

This world's spin was the same as had been given to the others, moderate and forgiving. This rotational energy fed the slide of vast plates of rock, masses that rode over each other, butting and slamming and sliding with tectonic fury. Chunks the size of lesser worlds rammed each other, forcing out still more heat and gas and bubbling lesser liquids.

Rust-red ran the rivers. Energies sparked and danced over the scummy seas. Again, life kindled.

Molecule loved molecule and order built up its jigsaw chains.

Beta was beautiful in her ruddy, simmering splendour. Canyons yawned, rivers carved deep, moist deltas spread in ample sites for the brimming life. Crusts of algae lined the lakes, lapped at the shores. She kept carbon in its place, a light blanket suitable for infants. Even a little oxygen salted the soft layers of sheltering cloud.

Her world frothed with fervour, while inward, Alpha

raged impotently.

But... mass began to tell. Again, fierce ultraviolet from the distant sun broke water into disloyal hydrogen, which rushed off into the welcoming vacuum. Oxygen wandered forlorn... and the pinks won over.

Rust grew like a fungus on her mountains. Volcanoes voiced their vapour wealth, but the fires below them ebbed. The sputter of Omega-born radioactives slowed. Heat leaked away from Beta's small, beautiful, doomed world. High above the once sheltering sky, now skimmed clouds of carbon dioxide ice. They chilled the world further, reflecting the sun's radiance away.

River valleys dried out as the air thinned. Carbon! – she did not have enough, now. Water sputtered away into space, and now Beta envied Alpha's rogue heats. She pined for her forlorn, shrinking seas. The life she had brought forth in beautiful, brimming births fell prey to the stinging ultraviolet that poured down, unhampered by the thinning water clouds.

Cringing algae retreated deeper into the rusty waters. Microbes fled into the hard rule of rock. Finally, dryness held sway. Seas shrunk to lakes, then dwindled to mud plains dotted with scummy ponds... and then, parched valleys of wind-blown sand and dust.

Soon, too soon, Beta saw even the winds still as the air froze out. Now the glinting poles of water and carbon dioxide ice inherited the last fleeting remnants of the atmosphere. Only a skimpy skirt of gas now hid the barren hills from the sun's full glaring onslaught. Oxygen trickled away, locked up by the iron in the ridges, making a rusty globe.

Her world had been too small, not too cold. With enough mass, Beta knew, she could have held onto the atmosphere until the sun slowly warmed. A mere matter of a few billion years would have made the difference.

Her flinty anger froze into a glacial silence.

Gamma laughed.

Never nostalgic for the old ways and symbols, this small god chose no sex, preferring to be called by Beta and Alpha an It. Impersonal forces worked within the god's ample reach.

Gamma shifted constantly. It danced, slid, rained and erupted – manifesting as matter, sounding all the grace notes of mass in its movements. No single mode captured Gamma's attention for long.

Gamma's World was lucky – not too near the sun, not too small in mass. But to fashion a suitable nest would take more than blind luck, the incidental collision of parameters. With enough mass Gamma's planet would retain the internal heat of its first compression, and the slow sputtering fires of radioactives throughout its mantle.

Again carbon dioxide graced the early airs, sang through belching volcanic chains, spun storms and danced destruction on countless shores. For from the first, there were seas. Comets smashed into the ruddy brown methane, bringing a ponderous plenty of ices and precious organic molecules.

As with the earlier failures, these long chains kindled interesting marriages between groups of dancing

molecules. Some learned to copy themselves and overwhelmed the others. Cells drew themselves apart, whispering thinly of pregnant promise.

Water worked its wonders, digging great basins for the oceans that grew with each hammering of iceteroids, each volcanic belch. Wind and water's rub opened fresh rock to the air, trapping carbon, so that its oxides got locked away.

Gamma coaxed, taught... dreamed. The sun waxed, learning its own nuclear pathways. Over billions of years it built its pyre higher. The rise worsened Alpha's inferno, but was not nearly enough to salvage Beta's icebox. But beneath Gamma's gaze, the middle world's warmer surface increased the weathering rates, plucking more carbon from the thick skin of air.

Not that no problems loomed. There is an ebb and sway to worlds, and it can go unbalanced. At times a large rock would come smashing in, cloaking all in cloud and dust. Temperatures plunged, the poles crept toward the equator.

Several times, the eating ice came close to blotting away all the absorbing ocean and land, smothering it beneath the bone-white shroud that would have doomed all the life that sang and grew within the seas.

But each time, the volcanoes saved Gamma's planet. They gorged themselves on deep stores, spewing these into chilly air, bringing the warmth of carbon dioxide and water to the dry, cold surface. Gamma laboured, worried, breathed fire where It could.

The chilly rocks above lost their hunger for carbon, letting it build anew in the clear skies. Each time, so near victory, the crust of ice retreated. But it sat at the poles, awaiting its next opportunity. The catastrophe of whiteness always lurked.

Across the span of a hundred million years, new sea floor upthrust into mid-ocean ranges, spread like a crusty pancake, made fresh land. Then it would reach an edge, slow... and be sucked down into the lava below.

Such subduction drew into the mantle stores of carbon, then replenished them as the mass again returned to the surface, again in mid-ocean. This immense clock cycled carbon through the rock shell, a ticking so profound that Gamma Itself could scarcely mark the time.

For now the very air had learned to edit the quickening sun above. Ozone built, a prickly skin of ferocious oxygen, cloaking the atmosphere on high. It soaked up the sun's sleeting ultraviolet, eating eager photons. This world became a milder place.

Below, life lifted its head. Slime stuck itself out from its crannies, and found the sunlight obliging. Free at last from the sledge-hammer blows of piercing radiation, algae ventured across barren slabs of stone.

Such thin sheets exhaled gratefully. Gases mingled. The cloaking air obliged, and cadences surged between cloud and sea and land – the elemental dance.

Such stately rhythms graced the waltz of worlds, but only on Gamma's did the music play on.

Among the outer giant planets, life found purchase in the clouds of ammonia, or deep in the buried oceans of moons. But all snuffed out as energies ebbed, or currents carried

microbes to their deaths in places cold and unforgiving.

This gravid gavotte of ice, from pole to the skirts of the equator, had effects that pleased Gamma. Life had grown to maturity in the oceans, and then ventured onto land.

The coming of the glaciers crushed much of it, but the survivors were hearty, rugged, different. Each time a pruning left behind new traits that life came to enjoy in its restless rummaging for new places to poke, eat, make more of itself.

Some simpler parts of life's armies came to regulate the atmosphere's own ebb and loft. Microbes gnawing in rock liberated carbon when needed, aiding the geological grace notes that sounded through millions of years. Plankton pruned the air, flinging sulphide forth to make clouds.

And so, while Beta and Alpha glowered from their dead spheres, Gamma rejoiced. Laughing, It slid from gas to mass to forking plasma – all states of Creation knew its surge and beat.

It was having such a good time, Omega's arrival surprised It.

Omega was pleased.

Alpha's heat and Beta's freeze it dismissed. Sad lessons, so often learned, but always forgotten in the slow sad sway of eternity.

Chuckling with deep bass plasma waves, It lingered over the crystalline air of Gamma's World. Skated through the shimmering aurora. Savoured the saline seas, their bouquet of life. All of it was Just, and also Right, and so Just Right.

For Omega was not a god, but a Principle. Alpha, Beta and Gamma hailed Omega's entrance, a wise searchlight probing forth.

Gods work within the Rule of Law. This universe had come forth like a blossom from the Meta-Universe, from which all lessons finally issued. Knowledge came from the percolation of experience through the sieve of Law.

Omega was the Principle which gave forth Law. Only Omega knew Purpose, for Law could not see the end aim of itself, any more than a mortal can fathom the point of Eternity.

Omega stroked Gamma, imparted fresh vision – and on the green face of Gamma's World, a slow kindling began. In what is to gods a mere tick of time – and to Gamma, a nothingness, for It stands outside of Time – crafty cognition brimmed, rose, thrust up its own puny peaks.

In an eye-blink, intelligence spread across the lands. Leaped into the skies. Spanned between worlds – seeking, seeking.

These motes of fevered ferment sniffed the scorched plains of Alpha's World, and learned from its terrifying example. More particles of reason prodded Beta's World. They clambered down through ancient, volcanic vents and found there the valiant, trapped remnants of what had once enjoyed sunny seas.

Omega watched, and instructed the gods. Gamma sat on the Right side, and learned well.

Mortified, Beta watched as the motes spread soil upon her world's poles, implanted microbes, kindled long-slumbering fires in the feet of dead volcanoes. In a twinkling,

gases sprang anew. Warmed her world. Began to flirt with fragrances organic and promising.

Alpha was over its pique, and so waxed glad to see His World start to cool. The motes had arranged shields, moved mountains, sucked the planet away from the still-waxing fires of the sun.

Omega showed Gamma what would become of even so fine a world as It had wrought. As the star burned still brighter, carbon would again come to rule the air. All the finely balanced rhythms of geology, sea and life and land – all would come to nought.

Except for the Principle. The new Mind that now played out its dramas among the worlds had seen the lesson early. It moved Gamma's World, shrouded it too against the glare, and prolonged its life.

Not content, it stirred the inner gut of the star itself, to cool the fires, extending its life ten-fold.

By this time, the Principle was enormously (how else?) gratified.

The motes of Gamma's World had seen the Just and the Right. Now that their reach enfolded all the worlds of the system, even the dead hulks orbiting far out, in primitive states – now that they had done the work of gods, the Principle became clear.

Life spread. Intelligence, crusty and crafty. Like a disease upon inert mass, it brought ferment.

First to the nearby stars, hesitant colonies, some doomed. With time, it learned, adapted, paid the price of blood and toil and death. Yet kept on. (What else to do?)

Then in a gathering rush, it spread – a spectacular stain across the great gyre of the galaxy. It penetrated to the Core, and read the meanings there. It learned tales of vast black portals into the Meta-Universe, of voyages into that shadowy realm. And of what lurked beyond, transcending the paltry limits of illusions like Space and Time.

All this, from creatures born on the plains of now-distant Omega's World. They chattered and chattered and clutched each other. But on their two spindly legs they kept coming.

And so Omega came full course, and ate its tail, and told its tale. Life, ever clever, engulfed the realms of brute matter. And the Principle again burst like fresh light upon the cooling, forever expanding darknesses.

Alpha, Beta and Gamma (coming first) greeted these motes of Gamma's World. Small they were, but promising. Here was fresh companionship – the point of it all.

They blended. And came to be called Zenith.

Copyright © 2001 by Abbenford Associates

Gregory Benford – a professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at the University of California, Irvine, as well as a notable sf novelist – previously appeared in *Interzone* with "Freeze-frame" (issue 17), "As Big as the Ritz" (issue 18) and "Kollapse" (issue 94). We are pleased to welcome him back after such a long time.

THE GHOST SISTER

In this richly imagined and thought-provoking novel, Liz Williams tells the story of a world engineered to preserve the precarious balance between animal and human.

To this world comes an emissary from a distant planet who will walk the razor-thin line between consciousness and instinct, freedom and conformity, life and death...

Available now from good booksellers and on-line from www.amazon.co.uk

www.bantamdell.com

LIZ WILLIAMS

Junk Male

James Lovegrove

<<Good morning. This is DAIMoN. It's seven-fifteen a.m., and before we embark on another day of your favourite music, Nigel, first a word about an intimate problem. Going a little thin on top? Finding a few too many strands of hair in the shower plug-hole? Scared to run your hand through your locks in case you feel... scalp? It may be time to think about a course of treatment at the Samson Clinic. At the Samson Clinic, they care about baldness, and they have the technology to stabilise and even retard the process of hair loss. There's no trick in their trichology! And now, back to the music...>>

IN TODAY'S EDITION OF **The Individual** YOUR DAILY NEWSPAPER

The government's new taxation schemes and how they will affect you, Nigel Cunliffe. p2

Melting polar icecaps – how, as a resident of the London Basin, you should be concerned p4

Single men in their early thirties: a revealing new lifestyle survey you must read p7

It's your mother's birthday next week – what sort of gift does a woman like Margaret Cunliffe want? p13

Reviews of –
the TV programmes you have been watching
the books you are reading
the movies you are planning on seeing. p21

Your horoscope p34

Crossword (exactly your preferred level of difficulty) . . p36

PLUS in the Financial Section: how your particular mortgage, Nigel Cunliffe, compares against the mortgage schemes offered by five other major building societies. Are you getting the best deal possible?

MAGNABANK plc.

Dear N.G. Cunliffe,

Fed up with continually being refused an extension on your credit limit?

Fed up with a crippling interest rate?

Fed up with your credit card company selling your purchasing details to anyone who asks?

We know you are!

So why not open a Magnabank Boom Card account?

With a Boom Card you can have any credit limit you ask for*. And we promise to levy an interest rate 1% less than you are currently being charged+. And we won't sell your purchasing details if you don't want us to++.

Move over to Magnabank today and watch your spending power go BOOM!

* Within reason.

+ For the first month only.

++We will assume you do unless you fill out a desist form, obtainable from our head offices in Thurso. Opening hours: Monday to Wednesday, 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. In-person requests only.

YOUR VERY OWN PERSONALISED DIGITAL CHANNEL!

Now's the time, Nigel Cunliffe, for you to get the TV channel you've always wanted. The TV channel you deserve.

NIGEL CUNTILFFE TV

We know what you like. We know what you want to watch.

When was the last time you looked in the TV guide and thought, "There's nothing on!"

We reckon it was yesterday evening.

NIGEL CUNTILFFE TV is a different kind of TV channel, aimed squarely at one person – you. For as long as you subscribe to NIGEL CUNTILFFE TV, never again will there be "nothing on".

For example: if you had NIGEL CUNTILFFE TV, yesterday evening you could have been watching...

- All-Naked Pro Lesbian Wrestling
- Three randomly-chosen episodes of Scooby Doo
- Blade Runner (Director's Cut)
- Highlights of the European Extreme Beer-Drinking Championship
- Your absolute favourite Avengers episode (the one with Diana Rigg in a basque and dog collar)

Sign up now and we'll throw in a gift certificate entitling the person of your choice to one free month of their very own personalised digital channel (e.g. your mother, Margaret Cunliffe).

Dear friend,

Are the stresses and strains of modern living getting you down? Too much choice? Too much to think about? Money worries? A sense that there must be more to life, there must be a meaning?

Perhaps now is the time to turn to Jesus.

Jesus has a place in His heart especially for people like you, Nigel Cunliffe. He knows your troubles and burdens, and He wants to take them off you. With Jesus as your ally, Nigel, and the Bible – God's Word – as your guide, life will make sense again.

Here is a New Testament quotation, specially selected by our computer for its relevance to you, Nigel:

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?

– St Luke's Gospel, ch.12, v.6

If you're curious and want to find out more, contact us at the Temple of the Latterday Evangelists.

We're waiting. And so is Jesus.

K-NEKT TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Your ref: 00351 28187

Dear customer,

Have you heard about K-Nekt's new call discount scheme? You already use PersonalTime on your mobile line tariff, giving you a 15% saving on your subscription to DAIMoN. Now, with new Nearest & Dearest, you can talk to three other residential users of your choice on both your mobile and your fixed lines at a significantly reduced rate.

Thousands of K-Nekt customers have already taken advantage of this great offer, and so can you. For example, by including Mrs M. Cunliffe on your Nearest & Dearest list, you could save yourself an average of £5.66 on your quarterly bill.

So if you haven't done so already, now is a really good opportunity to join Nearest & Dearest and get closer to the ones you want to get closer to.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,

Juliette Wolfe

Head of Communication Management

<<...and now, before more music. Nigel. While you're listening to this on your way to work: have you considered taking the bus instead of the Tube? Your nearest bus stop is three hundred metres closer to your flat than your nearest Tube station, and allowing for traffic variables you could shave as much as nineteen seconds off your daily commute time! Not only that but you'll get less interference on your phone-signal reception. Use the London bus network. It's your city, your buses. And now back to the music, and a real blast from the past. You were in your fourth year at William Wilberforce Secondary Modern, Nigel, when this came out...>>

+ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH
+++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLA

09:06

Job Exchange Update

*Cunliffe, N.G. – Customer #65729 –
Present employment: statistics entry
specialist (full-time) with Colcourt
Revell Information Storage Ltd.*

*There are currently no suitable
position(s) vacant within your sector.*

*Please keep us informed of any new
qualifications and/or any alterations in
your employment status.*

Thank you.

SH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH + DATA F
LASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA

11:17

**The mid-morning slump. Not enough sleep last night.
Thoughts slowing. Eyelids drooping.**

Get over it instantly with CaféSharp!

**CaféSharp is extra caffeinated for extra alertness, extra
productivity, extra zing.**

**Ask your office manager to order CaféSharp for the
vending machine.**

+ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH
+++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLA

12:49

With lunch coming up, shouldn't you be thinking about using the time to look for that ideal present for a loved one's birthday?

Wilson and Schnabel, London's premier jewellery emporium, is just around the corner from where you work. We have a wide selection of beautiful gift ideas for that special lady in your life, ranging in price from "affordable" to "no less than she deserves".

Drop by after you've had your sandwich in the park.

We'll be expecting you!

<<...and it's lovely and sunny in your neck of the woods and looks set to stay that way for the rest of the day, but before we resume your lunch-break choice of mellow sounds, Nigel, let's talk about diet. That cheese-and-pickle sandwich you bought from Paula's Patisserie eleven minutes ago isn't doing your

cholesterol level any favours. Your medical records show a blood pressure way above average for a thirty-three-year-old Caucasian male. You don't want to end up like your father, do you? Dead at fifty? So how about a Pharmland Healthy Options lunch? All Pharmland stores stock a range of yummy sandwiches all with less than a hundred calories, mouth-watering desserts with less than a gramme of fat, and great sugar-free soda drinks. There's a branch of Pharmland just two doors along from Paula's Patisserie. Why not go there tomorrow for a change? Your taste buds will thank you, and so will your arteries! This is DAIMoN, and let's get back to the music with a new release we're pretty sure you're going to like, Nigel...>>

++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLAS
H +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FL

14:37

Lonely?

Bored?

Stuck in the same old routine?

Tired of staring at the VDU?

Seek out a new horizon!

Go on a *Vista* vacation!

At *Vista* we have literally thousands of holiday packages designed with the single male in his early thirties in mind.

Whether you want to meet new friends, dance the night away, have a wild and crazy time with people your own age, or simply lie on a secluded beach, reading and soaking up the sunshine, we have the holiday for you.

Call today, and this time next week you could be enjoying your very own tailor-made *Vista* vacation.

+++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLA
SH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH + DATA F

15:02

The mid-afternoon slump. Lunch sitting heavy inside you. The office hot. Still two hours to go till clocking-off time.

Get over it instantly with CaféSharp!

CaféSharp is extra caffeinated for extra alertness, extra productivity, extra zing.

Ask your office manager to order CaféSharp for the vending machine.

SH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH + DATA F
LASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA FLASH +++ DATA

16:49

It's nearly the end of the working day. Have you wondered what you're going to do when you get home? Another evening in? Another home-delivered pizza? Another hour visiting online adult-recreational sites?

The perfect complement to your activities:
Beer To Your Door.

Any brand of stout, lager, bitter – you name it, we have it, and we can get it to you within half an hour.

No need for that weary trudge to the off-licence any more. Just call the number below.

Beer To Your Door. *It's a dream come true!*

<<...and that was an uplifting little number, wasn't it? This is DAIMoN – Digital A.I. Mobile Network. We're still here, broadcasting direct to you, Nigel, and before we give you the news headlines that matter to you personally, first a suggestion: have you thought about changing your phone? A Ventura V20 with slimline styling and pin-sharp stereo sound is not only the best-value mobile on the market, but if you buy the phone and transfer your account from K-Nekt to Ventura Air, we'll throw in one hour of free call time! Call now to see why all sensible phone-users are taking up Ventura. But don't do that until after you've listened to the latest news update from Tangential Media...>>

"Good evening. I do apologise for disturbing you at home. I'm calling on behalf of the Water Scorpion Preservation Trust. Here is my identification badge. We're in the area going from door to door asking people if they would like to donate money towards the preservation of Britain's water scorpions. With the sea encroaching on this country's wetlands year by year, the native water scorpion population is in steep decline and threatened with extinction. With your help we can –"

"Good evening, Mr Cun- Cunliffy? This is Wendy at Fine-Form Windows. Now, I'm not ringing to sell you anything, just to ask a question. If we were to replace your windows free of charge, would you agree to your residence being used as a show-home for our –"

"Hello, Nigel. Howard Agar from the *Samson Clinic*. Perhaps you heard our ad this morning? This is just a follow-up call to determine whether you'd –"

"Mr Cunliffe. Mark from *Beer To Your Door*. You haven't placed an order with us yet, and I was wondering if I could tempt you with our special offer on Seppuku Japanese lager. We're doing twelve cans for the price of –"

"Mr Cunliffe? Nigel Cunliffe? No, please, don't hang up. This is Martin Bryant of the Department of Data Registration. Forgive me for not getting in touch sooner. I know you've rung us several times. We've been experiencing a few technical glitches lately and I'm only just catching up with a huge backlog of work. Anyway, I'm talking to you now, so that's good. It's about your mother Margaret. You applied to have her name expunged from the data records... when was it? Three months ago. Oh, I'm sorry. Four. Super. Now, there's just a couple of details I want to check before I give the go-ahead for a total purge. You give the date of death as February the eighteenth, but the hospital records clearly state that it was the nineteenth. I see. Yes, an error. Perfectly understandable. Quite. You also put the cause of death as 'an accident'. We need you to be a little more specific. A car accident. OK. Loss of control of vehicle. Collision with a tree. No other road-users involved? Fine, lovely. Thank you, Mr Cunliffe. That's a great help. We should have your mother eliminated from all extant databases within ten working days. Please get in touch if she pops up anywhere after that time and we'll do what we can to sort it out. Yes, I realise it's been very trying for you. We've been doing our best, but what with one thing and another – Well, excuse me, Mr Cunliffe! There's no call for that kind of language."

<<...and hey, Nigel, seeing as you're out and about somewhere – great night for a stroll. To enhance that lonely-urban mood, here's some Leonard Cohen, followed by some Tom Waits and a little bit of Nirvana...>>

<<...Nigel, we're getting word over the police communications net that there's someone standing on the side of Albert Bridge, getting ready to jump off. Someone whose description sounds a lot like you. Is that you, Nigel? Because if that is you on Albert Bridge, get in touch with the Suicide Hotline right away. There's someone there ready to take your call, and don't worry about the cost – it's a cheap-rate charge. Nigel, talk to them. Now, Nigel...>>

<<...Nigel, are you there still?...>>

<<...Nigel?...>>

James Lovegrove, born 1965, is the author of the novels *The Hope* (1990), *Escardy Gap* (with Peter Crowther, 1996), *Days* (1997) and *The Foreigners* (Gollancz, 2000), among others. He lives in East Sussex's county town, Lewes, and his previous stories for us were "Britworld" (issue 66), "Giving and Taking" (issue 104), "The Driftling" (issue 121), "Terminal Event" (issue 150) and "Speedstream" (issue 163).

interzone

Lifetime Subscriptions

If you can afford to do so, why not consider supporting this magazine by taking out a very long-term subscription?

We define a lifetime sub as one which lasts either the lifetime of the subscriber or the lifetime of the magazine.

Lifetime subscriptions to *Interzone* cost £340 (UK), £400 (overseas), \$600 (U.S. accelerated surface mail). Please make your cheque payable to "Interzone" and send it to our main editorial address, shown on page 3.

interzone

BACK ISSUE SERVICE

is now provided by

"The TALKING DEAD"

SPECIALISTS IN OUT-OF-PRINT
SF, FANTASY AND HORROR



Paperbacks, Harcovers, Proofs,
Magazines and Pulp



Full *Interzone*

back issue listing available

THE TALKING DEAD

12 Rosamund Avenue, Merley, Dorset BH21 1TE (UK)
01202 849212 talking.dead@tesco.net

Meeting *the* Relatives

Ruaridh Pringle

A year after the event, the last moments in the corporeal life of my friend, maverick physicist Todd McReady, were still etched in my mind with startling clarity. Typically, Todd had been the only one of us wearing a dinner jacket (Armani, needless to say). Something I could be grateful for: if he'd worn the more conventional T-shirt and Bermuda shorts I'd have been treated to a scene from the worst kind of horror film.

It had been a party, for crying out loud. People didn't just dissolve at parties. For a person to dissolve wasn't exactly common *anywhere* so far as I knew then, and a departmental function was arguably as good a time and place as any, but still, it seemed somehow far too banal a setting for a fate so exotically gruesome.

I had been observing him charm a blonde employed somewhere in South Central's law division on one of the upper floors. She had been gazing down at his impish face. Moments later he had been clutching his head, complaining of being "about to chuck." I had ascribed this to the cocktails he had been putting away for the last hour. After several minutes of his absence I'd been concerned enough to push aside the door of the toilet cubicle.

And there he'd been. Seated, returning one last, blank stare from those clear green eyes as his flesh boiled and evaporated, eyes withering and bubbling, the skull itself becoming moth-eaten, crumbling and steaming, generating a thick cloud of sweet-smelling vapour. Then the empty clothes had just folded themselves haphazardly into the loo.

There hadn't been a night when that image didn't haunt me, but my primary feeling had mellowed to one of loss. I missed him. His reckless grin, and easy charisma. His way with words – Irish, somehow even in Spanish. Our flights of fancy over the principles of starship design. His blue-sky research wing was closed now, his files deleted, so far as I could tell. Depressing, but inevitable. He was the only one who really understood the maths he was

exploring, anyway.

My friend was an early victim of what the media had labelled "megabugs." There hadn't been actual panic yet, but megabugs were just beginning to scare the shit out of the literate half of the population. Little was known about them. The line of the World Health Organization was that they were viruses or bacteria evolved to near omnipotence by longterm over-use of drugs. Infections in westernized countries had been, fortunately, rare.

If anything, Todd had been lucky. Some victims, including one of Todd's old research team, had been... *morphed* was the most accurate term I could find... into something horrible – and, eventually, very dead. It was all something most people, myself included, tried not to dwell upon.

"Steadman, I wonder if you can do a small favour for me."

Ali Pushpinder, my boss. As always, using my full first name in all its vile glory.

"Doctor Steadman, to you." Whatever the favour was, it wasn't small. Ali was a decent man, I suppose, but I perpetually itched to slap him. I might have been essentially an IT hack half his age, but the title I'd earned merited just a *little* respect.

The expected condescending rebuke failed to materialize. "Steadman, I want you to do a file sweep. For McReady's old stuff."

"The files were all deleted, Ali."

There was something in his expression that I couldn't quite quantify. He seemed unusually haggard; his voice strained, as though fearful of eavesdroppers. "What I'm after is ghosts on the platter-stacks. Or temp files someone missed."

I swivelled my chair to face him. "That's borderline, isn't it? And not strictly anywhere near my remit."

"Don't go all bureaucratic on me, Steadman! Can you do it, or not?"

"I need a reason."

"He was your friend."

"What's that to do with his files?"

Ali was looking shiftier now. "He was a friend of mine too, Steadman. If you were really his friend, don't ask questions, and see if you can find those files."

"I don't need lectures from *you* about being his friend!"

I was angry now, but he just raised a hand. "Just look for the files. Please. Okay?"

I did as asked. I trawled through every relevant waste-bin and comms directory, and scrutinized the free space on every damn one of the division's ten dozen multi-terabyte hard drives. I had my 'ware analyze every little lost cluster, dissect system registries, and investigate every temp file. Nothing.

Which was bizarre. Even clean deletions usually left *something*.

It was getting late. Beyond the window the taller skyscrapers of Buenos Aires were pink in the sun's last rays. Soon just their tips were crimson, fading to the anaemic glow of interior lighting. Ali wasn't in his office. I dictated him an e-mail describing my lack of success, and on impulse encrypted it. I logged off, grabbed my scooter, and traversed the corridor to the lift.

As the lift whisked me towards ground level, I found myself increasingly uneasy. Beneath a patina of confidence I was chronically short on self-belief, as a rule, and I was struggling to accept what my intuition was telling me.

Equally at home in theoretical and applied physics, Todd had possessed the enviable and rare ability to implement his wild ideas – to the irritation of many influential peers. His most recent avenue of research, theories of faster-than-light propulsion, had been well ahead of its time. There had been rumours that powerful people not just in the other five of the world's six ruling cartels, but in South Central as well, strongly disapproved of this avenue. Rumours I'd chosen to discount. Such objections seemed far-fetched when existing propulsion hadn't evolved beyond chemical rockets. Besides, what harm could it do?

I walked through the bustling lobby to the stifling street; the heat immediately triggering my T-shirt's thermal pump. I unfolded my scooter. I was seen as something of an eccentric because of my little solar-powered foldaway: something I enjoyed in a perverse way. My average journey time was half that of a car, and with larger vehicles slaved to the traffic net, it was less dangerous than was apparent. Nothing like the suicidal mission it would have been early in the century.

My flat was pretty average for someone in my comfortable salary bracket, though I guess the decor took a few people by surprise. Iridescent fibre-optic hangings from Thailand, moose antlers from a zoo in the Yukon, a framed pastiche of oak leaves from northern Norway. Whale vertebrae lying around. I'd seen quite a lot of our tired old world in my time – enough to imagine what the great forests must once have been like. Parts of it that I found interesting, or strange, or simply portable, ended up here. It's not as if I entertained very often. My place was just for me.

The light for the flat's antique message system was winking. Feeling crabby and unsettled, I ignored it. To make matters worse, I had early symptoms of 'flu. Forehead clammy, and a little shaky, I resigned myself to a week of misery, took some aspirin, and sprawled on the sofa with a Southern Comfort to watch the news on the viewing wall.

It's difficult now to remember such strange, simple pleasures. The delicious feeling of slouching; relaxing one's limbs, and draping, with delightful physical self-indulgence, over a soft, equally physical thing designed for the purpose. Or alcohol: the peculiarly comforting hotness of its passage down a receptive throat. All that physical stuff: only truly appreciated once it's gone.

Anyway, I digress. The news was the usual wars, plagues, famines and murders, and the incessantly winking light was bugging the hell out of me, so I played the message. I had to de-scramble it.

"Steadman!" screamed Ali's voice. There was a gargling intake of breath. "Steadman! Leave your house, now! Fast as you can. Go... to..." Then there was just screaming. Terrible, blood-curdling screaming. On and on.

As you might expect, this perturbed me somewhat. Which is how I explained away my sudden dizziness. I recall ensuing events only hazily. I think I sat back on the sofa, cradling my head and my Southern Comfort, thinking increasingly sluggish thoughts.

Then I was on the floor. On my back. Raising my head, watching my bare feet dissolving, in clouds of vapour. My own feet! Flesh on my hands pouring off my bones in clouds of glittering steam. I felt dazed fascination more than anything. It wasn't really painful. In some strange way it felt almost like release.

Then I couldn't see. Or smell. Or *feel*.

This was thoroughly confusing. I was conscious, so I couldn't be dead, I reasoned. But sensorially I was utterly deprived. My thought *process* felt subtly different too. Clear, but strangely linear. Unnaturally traceable. As though my mental processes still reached the same endpoints, but by simpler, somehow better-documented routes.

There were murmurs, almost like sound. Flutterings of unfamiliar sensation. Had I a voice, I thought, I would probably be screaming – although my condition was not quite one of panic. Then a voice. Suddenly, like someone abruptly reconnecting my ears.

"Steadman Thurman. Stead. Don't be alarmed."

"Who the hell are you?" I was relieved to hear that I had a voice, of sorts. I remained blind though. It wasn't merely darkness: more as though vision was something I'd lost all concept of. "Where am I?"

"I'm trying to save your life."

"I saw myself die! Shit! Who are you?"

The other voice was, in some elusive way, female. "You're not being helpful. I understand why, but until we escape... please just do whatever I say. I'm risking the life of this copy for you. Hostiles are after us. They'll eat us alive, given the chance."

"Copy?" A decision was required, and I made it. "Shit. Tell me what to do."

"Relax."

"I can't see!"

"Okay, I'll arrange you some vision." There were weird cracking noises. Then a billion images burst into my head at once. None made any sense.

"What's going on here? What is this? Eeugh! There's a gigantic... thing, *sucking me!* Aaaah! It's got hairy legs!"

"A carpet mite. We're in the carpet. Shut up! We need to make it to the wall."

"It's eating me!" I could even hear munching.

"Let it. You'll replicate, and there are millions of you." She pre-empted my next question. "Your mentality is stored in a swarm of nanobots, slaved to your identity. It's nanotechnology. Microscopic and submicroscopic machines. We got to you just before South Central did. That's why you felt dizzy: we were downloading you. Then South Central's 'bots got you, and destroyed your body. We're the Resistance."

"Resistance?"

"Shut up! They'll have left 'bots behind for surveillance – we've less than a minute before we're attacked. We must manufacture something to get us out, very quickly. Follow my instructions. Concentrate on looking *up*. Combine your sensors to look around the room, and concentrate on the pillar dividing the windows. It has the materials we need."

I did as told. My million fragments of vision coalesced into an incredibly clear view of a ceiling. I felt like an omniscient puddle. My focus swam to the door, then the window.

"Good! Now concentrate on getting to the pillar. I'll do the rest. Just will yourself to be there."

I certainly didn't want to stay in the carpet. The image disintegrated, and my sensation was one of being dragged like treacle between carpet fibres. Then upwards through a microscopic topography of pale green paint.

"Stop! Now burrow into the pillar. Think about digging. Picture yourself with a spade. As a single entity, as you were before." I complied. I was starting to get the hang of this. "Whoa! Far enough. Now, hold tight." I could feel movement around me.

"What's happening!"

"Will it shut you up if you've access to my sensors?"

"I... guess so."

I could see the pillar then, before me, as if I was suspended out in the room. In the soft light, part of it was glowing orange. Bulging. As I watched in amazement, a perfect miniature aeroplane squeezed itself slowly from the concrete like a hatching mosquito, and fell with a thump to the floor. My other viewpoints span towards the carpet.

"You okay? All of you inside?"

"How can I tell?"

"I'll take that as yes. Oh shit – they're here."

"Who? Where?"

"AI-controlled swarm. Look at the door." The alloy door was melting. Morphing. Becoming inexorably cylindrical. "We need armament – hold on." There was a sensation of straining, and tiny pods extruded themselves organically from the wingtips of our toy-like aircraft. Then the streamlined little machine leapt into the air

with a sharp "whap" from its ventral thrusters.

What had been a door was hurtling at us across the room, like a blunt black rocket with fangs, claws and...

We whirled to face it. Lightning-fast tentacles were lunging at us. *Like a squid's*, I thought, simultaneously terrified. A blinding fusillade of white-hot streaks spat from our pods. Then the thing was just an explosive spray of incandescent gobbets. Molten debris began explosively igniting the carpet and walls.

"Bloody hell!"

"Hold on!"

The little plane twirled again, darting towards the window and spitting another blinding volley. The window vaporized into a hot cloud, which we dived through into the street. I discovered a new problem. A film of foreign nanobots was chewing into the plane from the outside, slaughtering my machines faster than I could keep track. I yelped in pain and horror.

"Don't... just complain – help me kill 'em!"

Reflexively, my nanobots were already swarming to defend us. We were power-diving at the street, losing control as the battle raged and the plane dissolved. Our plunge was terrifying. I could *feel* the microscopic armies annihilating each other, consuming the plane in their struggle to replicate. We began regaining lost territory, but in agonizing increments. Finally able to re-form wings barely head-height above the street, our emergency turn was at g-forces I suspect only a machine could have tolerated.

Thirty stories above, something was happening inside my flat – something besides the inferno consuming my home. As we tore along the street above the bobbing hordes of human heads, devouring the last invading parasites as we dodged lorries and lamp posts, my flat's outer wall was smashed into a blizzard of fragments. Chunks of concrete and steel rained onto cars and people as a dark cloud of needle-shapes fanned from the gaping hole and out over the city.

"Shit. Right – we're going to have to multiply."

"Do what?"

"Duplicate our personality between different sub-groups. I know your learning curve's a steep one – but just try!" The aircraft was flattening. With a neat roll, it dived between the slats of a drain grate. Then we were rocketing down a sewerage tunnel. "Unfortunately their surveillance network is excellent, and they'll have maps of the sewage system. We're going to take casualties – but we can still come out of this." Service lights flashed past. "Concentrate on an image of lots of little Steadmans. I'll do the rest. Now!"

I did. It seemed very hard, and I only realized I'd already succeeded when one of my hundred other selves wisecracked about me being a dimwit. I felt no different in myself, but the knowledge that there were now many copies of me, none of them under my control, was highly disturbing.

"Attaboy. Here goes." The little aircraft was busy extruding itself into a flying wing, which rapidly disintegrated, becoming a diffuse cloud of a hundred tiny nee-

dles. An intense lance of bluish light sprang from each tail. "Fusion," said my mysterious friend.

"What?"

"Later." Each miniature rocket was grazing the sewer walls at high speed, trailing sparks. "Gathering more material. We're too small." I could sense the machines comprising my infinitely adaptable new body manically organizing materials into rocket structure and new machines. The needles ballooned before my virtual eyes until within seconds they were five times their original size, and still growing. "Here they come! Bugger. Time for a little self-sacrifice."

Before I'd even time to complain, a third of our missiles had sprouted manoeuvring fins and were streaking back the way we had come. A second later, a searing fireball was chasing us up the tunnel. My consternation must have filtered through.

"Fusion. Thermonuclear explosion. Clever boy, that McReady."

The radiating front of plasma was licking towards us along the cracking, disintegrating walls, squirted super-sonically along the sewer as if confined in the barrel of an enormous gun. Convinced it would catch us, I pictured manhole covers blown hundreds of metres in the air; pedestrians staggering. The explosion began to dissipate, and what had just been said filtered through. "McReady?" For a moment my thought processes went offline.

"McReady had the cartels scared shitless. Far too clever to be a loose cannon. And he left too many loose ends. Like you. You're lucky we got to you in time."

We came to a three-way junction and the group split, sub-factions darting up each tunnel. Then again at the next junction, and the next, and the next, until just two of us remained. Flattening into delta shapes, we slowed to hover below a manhole shaft, then shot up it to anchor ourselves by mats of filaments to the walls either side of the manhole cover. Having cut the lock bolts with lasers, our little delta-wings sprouted thumb-like appendages and gingerly levered the rusting cover aside.

A methanol-powered intercity bus was lumbering overhead, on rubber-tyred wheels now that it was well inside the hover-exclusion zone. Two whip-like tendrils slapped onto its underside, and we slid up out of the manhole, clattering up the road for a few metres before managing to clamp ourselves securely to the vehicle's floorpan. Then we were flowing into the corroded metal. Our copy hurled itself at a passing car and did likewise.

"We're disguising ourselves as a bus now?" I felt nanobots munching off through the metal around us.

"And we'll replicate again. Some of us'll leave the bus as dislodged stones, wrappers which blow out the door when the bus stops... Also in passengers' shoes, personal stereos and false teeth."

"How many of you are there?"

"Us? Oh – me personally? Don't know. It goes up and down. But mostly up. At the last count around 50,000 copies. It's really weird when you re-integrate. Some parts of you have undergone a lot of non-shared personal development meantime, which can make reintegration quite a jolt. And we're thinking ten times as fast as when we were

human, which leaves a lot of time to develop *in*. Some copies just won't re-integrate, and might as well be a different person. Shit... so much for that car. Time to go."

Our scouts on the bus roof were relaying images of an orange mushroom cloud rising over the street head. Tiny dart-like shapes were fanning in our direction.

Abandoning most of our nanobots, we hastily morphed the filth coating the floorpan around us into the likeness of a pebble and, feeling disconcertingly simplified and helpless inside it, dropped onto the road. The traffic was slowing. A taxi closely following the bus picked us up in the tread of its tyre. Seconds later it turned into a side street.

Twenty metres away, the bus exploded, shattering car windows and showering the street with burning debris. Hot metal clanged on the taxi roof. The taxi screeched to a halt, sideways across the road. Peering between arms clamped protectively around his head, the driver saw the burning remains of the bus in his mirror, and slid hastily out of the door. Crouched in the illusory shelter of his vehicle, he began gabbling into his radio, occasionally hazarding a peek over the roof.

"Who the hell are these people? They just kill anyone they like?"

"Your bosses. And, yes, more or less. A lot's at stake. They can't stop what they've started, though they don't know that yet."

"Why? What's this all about, anyway?"

"It's somewhat far-reaching. You'll find out soon."

"We're taking off again?"

"No – we stay put and wait – for now. Some copies of us will get through."

"Bummer for those of us who don't, though."

"Quite."

I did the nanobot equivalent of a heavy sigh. "Well, since we've nothing else to do, you may as well tell me about yourself."

She laughed. "Cathy. Teddington."

"Really? How very... English. What do you do? *Did* you do?"

"I was a waitress. In Pizza Hut. In London." I had the impression of a quizzical look. "Not what you expected?" Another little laugh. "You're *so* much a doctor."

Once the hubbub had died, after the taxi driver had made his statement to the police and all retrievable pieces of bus had been trailered away for the autopsy, the taxi crept back the way it had come, and out into the suburbs. Eventually the driver pulled up outside a rundown diner. We could see him at a window table staring into his vodka.

Abruptly, Cathy's 'bots dissolved our anchoring filaments. The stone dropped to the tarmac and flattened, sprouting tiny caterpillar tracks which scuttled us towards the safety of a flowerbed. Here we extruded into a worm-shape and, with rhythmic contractions and extensions aided first by our tracks, then by rings of backwards-slanting bristles, began to burrow. Abrasion and soil organisms destroyed nanobots in hordes, but I was little more conscious of this than I would once have been of the daily loss of my skin cells.

"Where are we going?"

"Home." I couldn't begin to imagine what home could be for Cathy. "You'll see."

To my surprise, after a lengthy period of steady replication and increasingly powerful squirming, we broke into a tunnel.

"What's this? My God... it's crawling with nanobots." The walls of the tunnel were coated with a seething sheen of 'bots, like agitated coconut milk. In ways I could not immediately define, what it represented disturbed me deeply.

"Public transport system," said Cathy. "Peripheral." She extended a pseudopodium of 'bots into the layer, and retracted it. "The folks know we're here. Other copies of us have already made it through. We can begin reintegrating soon. But for now, come with me. There's someone I'd like you to meet."

We moved through the stream, and the stream moved through us. It was a bizarre, almost overwhelming sensation: other personalities flowed, thousands at a time, into our spheres of awareness and out again, like liquids mixing only to separate. I found my senses suffused by an incessant background chatter of greetings, welcomes and congratulations directed at both Cathy and myself.

As we progressed, Cathy using some homing sense I did not yet understand, I would encounter some representative of my other selves, and, after a hesitant, embarrassing courtship, we'd re-unite, generating in me a brief but giddily feeling of godlike omnipotence, as if perception and cognizance were fleetingly multiplied. "Close your eyes," said Cathy eventually.

"Very funny."

"Steadman?" Said a voice. Sounding suspiciously like that of my secondary-school maths teacher. "*Steadman!* You filthy boy! Put that away!"

Except that it wasn't my maths teacher. Had I proper eyes, they would have popped. "Todd? *Todd?*"

"Ah, come *on*, you were not thinking I'd be letting myself just dissolve away like that, when even a dunce like you made it through? Me being a rocket scientist and all. Where's your faith, man?"

Momentarily speechless, I was swamped by an involuntary urge to put arms around him. In my unfamiliar current manifestation the result was rather more intimate than intended.

"Wait, look, ah boy... Ah, wait a minute there... No! Yuk. Oh no, come *out* of there! Look, man: have to get you tutored in some etiquette before you embarrass yourself. There are things which, as a dispossessed, you're just not supposed to *do*."

I was already embarrassed. "Dispossessed?"

"Of our bodies! Are you sure you did not lose your marbles in the transition?"

In the consciousnesses around me I sensed a peculiar reverence directed at the copy I'd hastily just disentangled myself from. An uncharacteristic insight hit me. "Todd – tell me you weren't the first."

"That made the transition? Sure I was. An element of luck was involved, mind you. The strain that attacked me was a copy with a serious weakness in it. I could see what was happening, so quick as a flash I went online,

opened up a link and uploaded myself into the little bastards. It proved quite easy – but then I did have a head full of terribly illegal optical circuitry. Now I'll bet you never knew that I'd a personal computer in my noggin – oh, but I'll burn in *hell!*"

I was amused to note that, even after the death of his body, Todd's discourse remained unstoppable.

"After that, it really was not that hard to master replication. Soon I was all over the place: right into all the encoded communication between the big cheeses at the top. Took no time to realize what was going on up there, and who was on their 'disappearing persons' lists – and why. Idealistic freelance scientists pushing their jumped-up ideas about transforming society, shouting about escape routes to the stars... the cartels and their governments had got themselves way too used to control of populations and ideas to have *that* kind of nonsense floating around.

"Their choice of weapon was easy – nanotechnology's been around for years, although it has not been exactly what any sensible person would call controllable. Self-replication means inevitable mutation – which you do not have to be any genius to appreciate means evolution, given half a chance. Do you recall those obnoxious little pandemics of the '50s? Nanotechnology. No evidence of course, because the little shites have inevitably degraded or fled long before any autopsies.

"So, to cut a somewhat meandering story short, I have a compulsive habit of downloading people shortly before they become un-people. There's something of a purge on at the moment – sociological control, all terribly Orwellian. The plagues in Africa, Malaysia, Russia, India and Central America – it's not disease, it's nano-eugenics! Culling the population of the smelly undesirable poor people so those of us born with silver spoons get to keep them a while longer. You see, Stead, what you might call the 'official unofficial' bottom line is that there are too few resources for everyone, and that our population must be halved or we'll soon revisit the dark ages. Zeig heil! *Oops*, that just sort of... slipped out.

"As a result of all this palaver I've been busy jet-setting. Distributing copies of myself, spreading the Resistance, as I melodramatically call it, and downloading people."

Even given (or possibly because of) what I'd just been through, I was finding all this hard to assimilate. "How many?"

"How many what? Oh, I see what you mean. Well, in our division at South Central alone, we intercepted 30 nano-assassinations, although I'm afraid we failed to reach Ali in time. We've made rescues everywhere: Japan, the Emirates of America, the United States of Europe. A lot here in Argentina and over the mountains in the Chilean province. But by far the majority have been from the third-world plagues. We lack accurate ways of calculating our numbers, to be totally honest – it's something of a moving target – but including all the spontaneous mutation since the shebang started, the figure is probably in the order of two or three hundred trillion more-or-less-independent beings, and doubling daily."

"Hell's gnashing teeth," I said quietly. "What have you started?"

"Started?" He laughed. "I can hardly claim to have *started* it! I was merely a link in an ancient process. Do you not see? It's evolution! Working in steps. Humans appeared in an eyeblink. Since then there's been only stagnation. By the hard-wiring into us, not just of the ability, but the *inclination*, to destroy the support systems we naturally depend upon, we've been propelled towards the next step. Did you think life was destined to stay on Earth forever? You should see what we're doing, Stead, it's beautiful! Here, let me show you." His presence changed subtly.

"What are you doing?"

"Calling your other selves. They'll be here in a few minutes. I should probably warn you not to be affronted if some of them would rather not reintegrate. It's not personal. If it – you know – nips a bit, feels like betrayal, just remember that some of them are probably perfect arseholes by now. I wouldn't piss on some copies of me if they were on fire! Ah, here we go. Come on boys, orgy time!"

Fifteen thousand copies of myself poured into my being like a high-pressure torrent until I felt I was bulging, exploding and suffocating, but simultaneously rising, screaming, towards some personal nirvana. Once sufficiently recovered, I noticed copies of myself skulking around my periphery. "Don't take this personally," they said shiftily.

"Yeah, right." I was feeling what I might once have called light-headed.

"If you'd been through what we have, you'd understand."

Todd led Cathy and me through a maze of subterranean piping. Presently we were inside tubes ten metres across, lined with dense ceramics. With my developing awareness, I could tell the space around me was a vacuum. Sleek shapes zipped through it almost too fast to follow. "This is where I take over," said Todd. He was peeling a great sliver of material from the wall of the tunnel. At his invitation, I burrowed into it. As it rose into the odd neo-light of the tunnel, he morphed it expertly into a slender lozenge.

And then we were streaking along the tunnel. The angle was shallow, but I could sense us descending. Other craft would zip past us in both directions. All at speeds impossible but for the vacuum. "Where are we going?"

"You'll see in a little while. The planet's crust has a good thickness around here, and it needs to for what we're doing. Soon I'll ask you to replicate yourself and spread out a bit. Keep spreading and replicating as far as you like. Then report to me what you've found."

The lozenge slowed. Then stopped, and began to merge with part of the wall. In eager packs my multiplying, foraging selves dispersed into the bedrock through an unexpected dense network of filament-like tunnels. Embedded in the rock were shapes, textures, refined materials... Ceramic and metal walls. Then spaces. Spaces filled with complex structures and solutions. With volatiles. With gases. "Oi!" Said several presences. "This is mine! What

you doing here?"

"Sorry! Todd said it would be okay – I'm just having a look. What *is* this?"

"Spaceship, innit."

"Oh – my – God."

My myriad copies began to re-coalesce and share information, only confirming what I already knew. I felt thoroughly numb.

The bedrock, as far as I dared to search, had been transformed by continent-spanning armies of microscopic robots into a vast fleet of quiescent starships. The smallest were metres long. The largest were so vast that the minor portions I was able to explore on my foray were city-sized.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Todd curiously, when I'd regrouped (with several minor fallings out with parts of myself).

"Bloody hell!"

"That's not very charitable!"

"How big an area is like this?"

He seemed to consider. "Well... so far nearly a fifth of the Earth's land area has been, by most practical definitions, converted."

"What? But... that'll destroy what's left! How will people feed themselves? What will happen to people in those areas? Don't you *care* what happens to the planet you'll be leaving?"

"It is fucked!" I had a strong mental image of the Todd I had once known waving his hands. "Nothing left is worth saving! Earth's bioregulatory systems are so screwed that the only certainty is that the next dominant species here is *not* going to be us. What we leave behind will recover in ways it never could with us trying to survive here. And we're giving every living person the means to join us. We've left them plans of the stardrive, nanobots to convert themselves. The *stars* are our future, Stead! Not this... this husk. Decisions are always easiest at the last minute – but how many more people do you think have to die if we leave it until then? Millions? Billions?"

I ummed and erred.

"Besides, nothing I can do about it now. Those ships you explored are living beings, in most ways we would understand. They're self-replicating and have fully conscious personalities which are descended from people, or groups of people. You can't stop it. They want to leave. They *need* to. You can't kill them all: apart from the practicalities, it'd be genocide."

"Todd. You have become completely bonkers."

"Ah, come on, I think you always suspected I was just a little bit eccentric. Besides, you think that I *designed* all this? I'd like to take the credit, Stead, but really I can not. What you have seen is just everyday people empowered beyond their wildest dreams. It's change. Change is good: the universe needs it. You've already been through the worst part. Now it's party time! For the first time in a thousand years, something exciting's going on – so stop being a gob-shite, and enjoy the ride."

Long ago, Cathy and I might have been considered a very

odd couple. And not just because she was a bubbly pizza waitress, and I a rather dour IT technician with a perpetual travel itch. One minor detail she had neglected to tell me until late in our relationship was that when she died she'd been old enough to be my grandmother.

Such rules did not apply now. Very few rules apply now.

Our starship was in the first wave to heave itself explosively free of the planet which spawned us. Soon the whole vast armada was ripping itself from the crust; scattering soil, boulders, mountains, lakes, plantations, villages, and the occasional city in its wake. There was pandemonium. We had broadcast a warning of course, and invited all the corporeals to join us. Predictably, the corporeal human race fought back, first with nanoplagues, and then with nuclear weapons.

But they could barely dent us. Our numbers were overwhelming. Ripping through the increasingly murky atmosphere and into space, few of us really saw the titanic craters and pits of lava we left behind; igniting the stardrives of our new metal and ceramic bodies, severing the last shackles binding us to our ancestral home with barely a backwards glance.

I know other copies of Cathy and me will have bickered, fallen out... perhaps even been at war. But our coexistence so far has been a happy, even tranquil one. Sufficiently for us to be considering a far more intimate and lasting union: a true meeting of minds. To date we

have seeded 32 planetary systems with our children, as we sentimentally (and, no doubt, presumptuously) like to think of them. As well as enduring curiosity, we have strong parental urges now and then. Recently these took us all the way back to the first solar system we seeded. To meet our relatives.

It's amazing what people can do, given the raw materials, limitless imagination, and no rules. Cathy once said to me "combine the problem-solving power of a million waitresses, and watch the earth move." Cathy the philosopher. Pizza with a smile and a maxim.

Theirs was the most impressive starship we've encountered so far, and we've seen a few in our time. Suffice to say that if it ever passed through the old solar system, the sun and nine not insubstantial planets would be smeared on its anterior disc like flies on a car windscreen. And its occupants were definitely odd. Not our sort at all. Last I saw, it was heading off under full power. Outwards. Just to see what's out there.

Maybe in another 100,000 years, when we've had a chance to mellow slightly, we'll go and see if we can find them.

Ruaridh Pringle first appeared as a new writer with "Surfers" (*Interzone* 164), and the above is his second published sf story. He lives in Edinburgh, and is – so far as we know! – no relation to the editor of this magazine.

'SPECTRUM SF is the most impressive magazine debut since the lamented *SF Age*.' Paul Di Filippo, *Asimov's SF*

'The line-up of authors is impressive.'

Carolyn Cushman & Charles N. Brown, *Locus*

'This is a new paperback format magazine, and it's one you should definitely make the effort to find.'

Don D'Ammassa, *SF Chronicle*

'Surely the most pleasant surprise for readers of short fiction this year was the advent of SPECTRUM SF, which hit the ground running ... and whose four issues contained stories that were all consistently readable and often better.'

Michael Swanwick, *Locus*

'It is impossible to recommend this magazine too highly.'

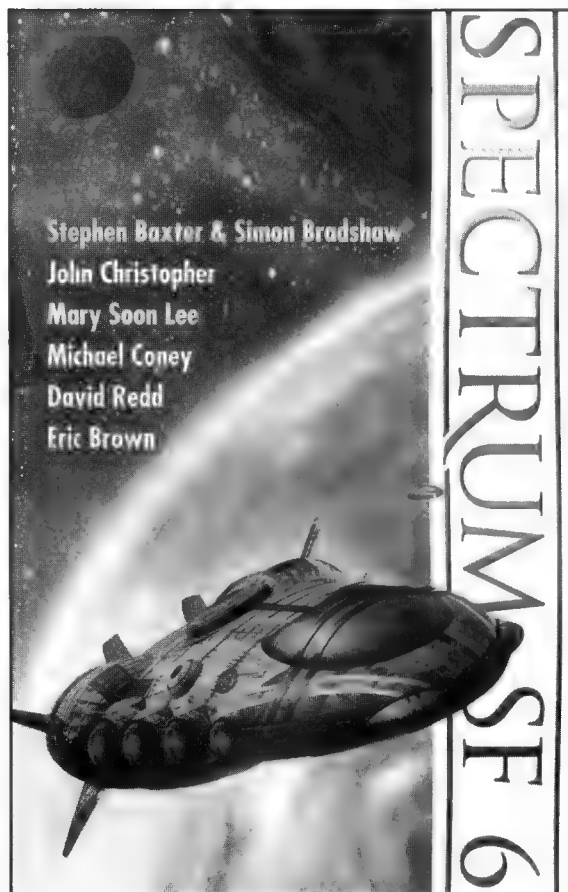
Paul Barnett, *The Paper Snarl*

'A very impressive and promising debut.'

Gardner Dozois, *Asimov's SF & Best New SF*

Price £3.99 B-Format Paperback 160 pages ISSN 1468-3903.
Worldwide subscriptions: £14/\$21 for 4 issues, £24/\$36 for 8 issues (non-European overseas copies sent by surface mail. Rates for airmail: £17/\$25, £30/\$45). Please send Sterling or US \$ Cheque, Postal or International Money Order, or credit card details (Amex, JCB, Master Card, Switch, Visa or Visa Delta) to: Spectrum Publishing, 53 Waverley Park, Kirkintilloch, Glasgow, G66 2BL, United Kingdom.

www.spectrumsf.co.uk



Your columnist has failed to interrogate either David Pringle or the estate of William Burroughs on the 21 June release of a new Internet-Draft entitled "The Interzone Routing Protocol (IERP) for Ad Hoc Networks."

THE FISH-FRYING ACADEMY

Iain M. Banks scaled new heights of product placement when his *Excession* was read aloud in the *Big Brother* TV household. Moreover, the reader (since evicted) didn't get bored for a whole ten minutes.

Arthur C. Clarke, phoning the US National Air & Space Museum's annual Wernher von Braun Lecture event, said he's now (somehow) working with a Slovakian crew that uses a Russian "vomit comet" plane for zero-g ballet performances lasting just 30 seconds, "as long as a ballet should be." A US space activist group had offered to raise money to send Clarke to the International Space Station, but Sir Arf declined since "these days, I'm barely able to get to the Colombo airport."

Diana Wynne Jones denies – "not roundly, but with Spikes. And grace notes, most of them obscene" – that she has any intention whatever of writing, now or ever, anything even slightly resembling an eighth Narnia book, no matter what it may say in *The Independent*. The fuss about HarperCollins/Lewis Estate plans for de-Christianized Narnia spinoffs began with a leaked HC memo: "We'll need to be able to give emphatic assurances that no attempt will be made to correlate the stories to Christian imagery/theology." *Private Eye* (15 June) gleefully revealed that C. S. Lewis's stepson and executor Douglas Gresham wrote very firmly in 1998: "The policy [of the Lewis estate] is that no sequels or new Narnian chronicle stories will be permitted to be published. There are many reasons for this, but the most important is that Jack [Lewis] himself told me that there should be no more of them. [...] He said that all that should be said about Narnia had been said and there was an end of it." Presumably a secret codicil to Lewis's will overrides these wishes should huge enough pots of money become involved.

Christopher Lee became a CBE (Commander of the British Empire) in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June, and the *Guardian* helpfully added: "Lee, 79, is in the forthcoming film of C. S. Lewis' trilogy, *Lord of the Rings*." Also, it's now Gerry Anderson MBE.

J. R. R. Tolkien has at last been recognized in Oxford as famous for some-

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

thing or other: a blue plaque is to mark his former (1930-1947) house at 20 Northmoor Rd, courtesy of the Oxford Blue Plaques Board.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

As Others See Us. At last, respect! The *Financial Times* magazine *the business* (2 June) ran an article on the best ways to organize creative brainstorming: "Don't be a snob. Bring in someone who knows how to build things. Invite a customer service rep with field experience. Find someone who reads science fiction..."

Slaves of Publishing. *SF Chronicle's* report of Palm Inc acquiring e-publisher Peanutpress.com contains the chilling line: "The sale includes all 17 peanutpress.com employees..."

R.I.P. Tove Jansson (1914-2001), Finnish author and illustrator best known for the Moomin children's fantasies, died on 27 June aged 86. Her stories, written in Swedish, were much loved in English translation; their sunny, whimsical humour contrasted with Carrollian touches of threatening nonsense and inexplicable creatures. *David Potter* (1947-2001), knowledgable and opinionated US sf fan who posted copiously on Usenet as Gharlane of Eddore, died of a heart attack (apparently in his sleep) on 10 June. E. E. Smith himself had approved his use of that pseudonym from the Lensman books. *Prof. Kathleen Tillotson*, who died on 3 June aged well over 90, is mentioned by special request of Brian Aldiss. Besides "her splendid book of criticism, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*" he fondly remembers her influential support for Arts Council funding of *New Worlds* back in the 1960s.

HOMer Awards (voted by CompuServe sf/fantasy forums) novel shortlist: Robert Sawyer, *Calculating God*; David Gerrold, *Jumping Off the Planet*; Ken MacLeod, *The Sky Road*. And gorbimey, the short story nominations include "Different Kinds of Darkness" by D. Langford.

Small Press. Molly Brown was dismayed when, the very day that copies of her collection *Bad Timing* reached her, Amazon.co.uk told all the eager purchasers that their orders were cancelled. Amazon claimed to have checked with the publisher and confirmed the book was "no longer available" – a surprise for Ben Jeapes of Big Engine, who was *not* contacted. Insiders suspect the trouble (since fixed) stemmed from another cock-up by the distributors Ingrams, whose Lightning Source print-on-demand service has delayed several Big Engine titles owing to, in Ben's words, "their penchant for repeatedly printing the book the wrong size, which they did very energetically." Spies tell us that Lightning Source problems are a major pain for other new publishers like Richard Curtis's E-Reads. Meanwhile, Molly insists that "My book is actually available."

Digital Threadfall. Anne McCaffrey is deeply embarrassed that the dread W95/Magistr virus infected her computer and e-mailed dodgy .EXE files to various people in her address book, including Terry Pratchett and even me. Beware of suspicious attachments even from the great and good of sf...

Thog's Masterclass. *Dept of Neat Tricks.* "Kothar leaped, leaving his booted feet and diving a yard above the floor..." (Gardner F. Fox, *Kothar – Barbarian Swordsman*, 1969) "Whit slouched in a high-backed shaker chair with a boot on one knee." (Jean Stewart, *Return to Isis*, 1992) *Dept of Vegetable Love.* "He did not resist the temptation. He mounted that big old tree with primitive joy." (Piers Anthony, *Split Infinity*, 1980) *Dept of Eyeballs in the Sky.* "Trying to pull the chiefs' eyeballs down onto himself rather than onto each other, Tiny Acorn danced..." (Dominic Green, "Grass," *Interzone* 168, June 2001) *Dept of the Pathetic Fallacy.* "We join the terminally-ill protagonist as he sets out across inhospitable, empty vastnesses covered in scabby, suppurating sores..." (Peter Crowther introducing Tim Lebbon, *Faith in the Flesh*, 1998) *Dept of Metaphor.* "The all-over narrative is stuffed with nasty sweetmeats of ugly behavior that eventually turn on a dime and are leavened by a redeeming sprinkle of grace notes." (Edward Bryant, *Locus* 6/01)



A Star Down on Earth

Tim Robins

It's not difficult to trace the chain of associations that brought Sam Neill to the cover of the *Radio Times*, where he could be seen dressed like "Astromancer at C&A", implausibly cradling a galaxy in his outstretched palms.

Neill was fronting *Space* (BBC 1, Sunday, 22 July 2001, 8.30pm), a new documentary following in the footsteps of Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* and BBC 2's 1999 series, *The Planets*. Episode one, entitled "Star Stuff," traced the origins of life on Earth to the hydrogen cloud created by the Big Bang. Subsequent episodes were due to dramatize asteroid collisions with Earth ("Staying Alive"), terraforming Mars ("New Worlds"), an encounter with "the universe's ultimate monsters" ("Black Holes"), the search for alien life ("Are We Alone?") and galactic exploration ("Boldly Go"). Publicity for *Space* described it as "ground-breaking" and pointed to the use of "state-of-the-art computer graphics to make the universe come to life – from vast clouds where stars are born, to

planet-guzzling monsters such as black holes."

So now the associations should be clear. Ground-breaking new documentary series using state-of-the-art computer graphics are budget-guzzling monsters. Budget-guzzling monsters need stars to attract funding and sell them and, while the universe has more stars than Hollywood, only a *bona fide* film star is sufficient for a prime-time documentary. Neill has starred in *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic Park III* alongside state-of-the-art guzzling monsters; the BBC's *Walking With Dinosaurs* was a monster success, and so...

Private Eye's "Square Eyes" made different connections. "[Sam Neill's] qualifications seem to be that he played a scientist in the Australian movie *The Dish* and also wore a white coat in *Jurassic Park* and *Jurassic Park III*." Of course, intertextual references like this form the playing fields of publicists. If associations with CGI dinosaurs didn't grab you, Rupert

Smith's *Radio Times* article made a whole other set of comparisons, claiming, "*Space* owes an obvious debt to *Star Trek*" (21-27 July 2001, page 38). Meanwhile, a picture courtesy of the Science Photo Library showed *Doctor Who*'s TARDIS wheezing and groaning its way through a worm hole. *Space*, we were promised, "finishes almost in the realm of science fiction." The first episode borrowed the Blue Danube Waltz from the soundtrack of 2001: A *Space Odyssey* to accompany us there.

Space was science-fictionalized in a number of ways. For instance, it shared the secular world view that in general is characteristic of science fiction. As sf critic Mark Rose has noted, cosmology doesn't necessarily contradict a sacred universe. Copernicus described the sun as the throne of God and Newton felt that gravity and other "phaenomena" were evidence of an omniscient Being. *Space* – reflecting, like science fiction, the post-Victorian crisis of faith – was thoroughly secular.

The only act of creation here was the Big Bang, the only omniscient Being was Sam Neill, and the only prime mover an uneasy mix of populism and public service. There should be something subversive about placing a documentary like this at prime time on a Sunday evening where, earlier, *Songs of Praise* had been ignominiously bumped to BBC 2 by live coverage of the British Open golf championship.

Like science fiction, *Space* focused on worlds in collision. In fiction, this collision is anthropomorphized in terms of human beings encountering alien life – we go to them or they come to us. But, as Rose has pointed out, science fiction also dramatizes conflicting localities. *Space* achieved this partly through juxtaposing the Earth, represented as the safe home of humanity, with places that are inimical to human life.

However, *Space* also drew on characteristics of television as a cultural form, trading off television's apparently mimetic relationship to reality. Although universal statements about audiences are frowned upon these days, I tend to agree with Umberto Eco's point that audiences approach TV with a sense of credulity. So it is worth pointing out that considerable creativity goes into television's apparent transparency. *Walking With Dinosaurs* contained guesswork about the lives of dinosaurs, their colour, their habits, even their way of walking. The inventions of *Space* were different in kind rather than order. The programme's reconstruction of the sun seemed to be based on images produced from infrared and ultraviolet spectra not visible to the unaugmented human eye. Even if we could stand close to the sun and look at it without being blinded or irradiated, the sun wouldn't look the way it did here.

Like science fiction, television programmes juxtapose worlds. But, for television, these are the world of the home (the place of viewing) and the world outside the home, which comes to be constructed as a place of uncertainty, risk and even danger. It is this construction the allows television to be represented as a form of travel, and the world, or in this case the universe, as a place of adventure.

In *Space* the relationship between home and abroad was narrated in different ways. Neill's travelogue began on a beach in New Zealand, a suitably exotic location for a film star and for viewers back in Britain. However, as the *Radio Times* informed us, Neill is a

native of New Zealand and shooting the series there enabled him "to stay close to home, his family and his beloved pinot noir vineyards". So this was a home fit for the imagined leisurely life of a movie star, an exoticized home.

On the whole we were invited to see ourselves as sharing the same world, the same home, as Neill. Earth was, in Neill's words "one small planet we call our home" and the Solar System, "our neighbourhood." In this construction "out there" was deep space. For



Space, threats to our home came from overwhelming cosmic forces. Exploding stars, asteroids and black holes were the equivalent of reality TV's extreme weather or the news's stock threats to ordinary people and normal family life. In these instances, television becomes a window on a bizarre, freakish and hostile universe which reconfirms the home as a place of safety. Needless to say such constructions are almost entirely spurious. *Space* couldn't maintain such distinctions, particularly in its recognition that we are star stuff: the alien, the non-human, is part of our very nature.

Space's view of the world out there was also shaped by the institutional values of the BBC as an organisation, although its public service function was placed firmly in the background by the programme's producer, Richard Burke-Ward. Heading towards the open ground of entertainment at the speed of light, he appeared on BBC 1's *Breakfast Show* to reassure viewers

that, "this is *Space* the joyride, not *Space* the education."

Education can be entertaining and entertainment can be educating. However, once Lord Reith had characterized the BBC's mission as being to educate, inform and entertain these terms became part of the corporation's collective unconscious. Here they continue to exist as distinct, structuring categories akin to, in reverse order, the Id, Ego and Superego. They also act as points of triangulation, locating the BBC and its programmes on the terrain of broadcasting.

Burke-Ward's comments suggest the public service ethos may be finally edged off the map. If so, we shouldn't engage in too much hand-wringing. As my colleague Glen Creeber reminded me at a recent British Film Institute conference on "The Global Image," there is a lot of unwarranted nostalgia for the days when an unelected directorate with narrow class prejudices foisted a particular definition of culture on an audience considered in need of enlightenment while the diversity of Britain's population was subjected to demeaning representations – if that diversity was represented at all. And let's not get too snuffy about celebrity presenters. A movie star can popularize science on television in a way many academics can't. Carl Sagan was excellent in print, but I can't have been alone in finding his commentary in *Cosmos* somewhat distracting ("We youmans ah stah stoof"). Which only goes to show that consumers as much as patriarchs can encourage

exclusion, if based on a different set of criteria.

The view from *Space* was also shaped by cultural values beyond the BBC. The programme offered the universe as spectacle to a society of the spectacle in which images of nature are packaged as commodities (pay for the channel, buy the book, watch the video, see the DVD). And state-of-the-art capitalism ensured the labour of CGI animators was sold on the market piece by piece and reassembled byte by byte in the digital realm. Neill the man is no less of a labourer, Neill the movie star is no less of a commodity.

Of course images of space aren't only produced from the point of view of the salesman. In the 1960s, pictures of Planet Earth seemed to say something profound about the collective fate of the human race. Environmentalists and progressive rock groups read such images as signs of Earth's fragility.

Pictures from space were snapshots of Gaia for the family album of the brotherhood of man. Except these were also a future missile platform's eye-view of humanity taken by agents of the USA's military-industrial complex, mapping the world for a New World Order. The images incorporated into *Space* are little different.

There are territorial claims being staked out here, if only in the imagination. The Solar System may be Earth's neighbourhood, but all neighbourhoods are the USA's backyard. Neill told us hydrogen gave birth to stars, but hydrogen bombs deliver the future stillborn. In *Space* the two seemed inextricably linked despite Neill's script which, in a moment worthy of *Brass Eye*, seemed to distinguish between good hydrogen (stars) and bad hydrogen (bombs). Both were talked about with the same sense of wonder.

The forces that shaped *Space* also shaped Neill, who seemed to fulfil a number of functions. One was that of tour guide. This role is quite different from that of expert. Tourism emphasizes travel, voyeurism and entertainment. In this context knowledge becomes a kind of leisure activity and the audience become *flâneurs* rather than students.

There are two key metaphors through which the experience of tele-

vision is understood and misunderstood: television as a window on the world, and television as travel. The two are connected, but publicity for *Space* emphasized the latter: "space tourism is now a reality, and the final frontier is getting closer all the time," stated the strapline for Rupert Smith's *Radio Times* article; while the title read, "To Infinity and Beyond."

In the event, Neill was not so much Buzz Lightyear as a square-jawed Michael Palin. Like Palin, he was one of the new breed of television presenter who not only observes the world on behalf of the viewer, but experiences it as well. This era of touchy-feely tourism was inaugurated when a troupe of gorillas decided to pick the fleas from David Attenborough's hair.

However, CGI bestowed Neill with abilities Attenborough could only dream of. A wave of Neill's hand sent an asteroid careering over his head. I half-expected him to be superimposed onto the universe, looming over galaxies like a Marvel Comics character: Galactus, Eternity, or Ego: The Living Planet. Instead, Neill stayed in New Zealand and the cosmos came to him via what the press release described as a Virtual Space Zone. Here, four columns of light allowed Neill to stand next to suns, galaxies and the Big Bang. This resulted in some of *Space*'s sillier moments as Neill emerged

unsinged from an exploding star while the Big Bang buffeted him with a force no greater than a stiff summer's breeze. This demonstrated the wisdom of not placing David Attenborough among CGI dinosaurs: see David uncover a velociraptor nest, see David being disembowelled and fed to the young...

But the absurdity of placing a movie star among the stars comes as much from the reality of the cosmos as the contrivances of CGI. Real space is the limit of humanity. *Space*'s Virtual Space Zone brought together environments that could never otherwise occupy the same place. So another of Neill's functions was to humanize the inhuman, to make space familiar and familial.

So, in the end, what exactly were Neill's conditions of existence? Movie star, tour guide, spaceman, familiar face, commodity form. Up close and personal, he engaged the viewer in pseudo face-to-face interaction, a mediator of proximity and distance. Neill was a science-fictional figure. Present and absent, near and far, frontiersman and family member, human and inhuman, he became a heterotopia, a site for the interaction of possible yet contradictory worlds. For half an hour on a Sunday evening, Neill existed as an interzone located paradoxically at the edge of television's final frontier – the family living room.

Tim Robins



Interzone is Britain's best-selling science-fiction and fantasy short-fiction magazine, and the only monthly one. *The Ant-Men of Tibet & Other Stories* is a new paperback anthology of ten of its most entertaining stories from the 1990s: flamboyant space operas, chilly science thrillers, contemplative futures and comic fantasies. All are by authors who had their first or near-first sales to the magazine, and each story opens up an intriguing new world of fresh visions and ideas. This collection is a celebration of the diversity that is British science fiction.

Stephen Baxter ♦ Alastair Reynolds

Chris Beckett ♦ Keith Brooke

Eugene Byrne ♦ Nicola Caines

Jayme Lynn Blaschke ♦ Molly Brown

Peter T. Garratt ♦ Eric Brown

Order today from Big Engine Books

ISBN 1-903468-02-7 • PB • £8.99

PO Box 185 • Abingdon • Oxon • OX14 1GR • United Kingdom

www.bigengine.co.uk

"Lewes Babylon"

Dear Editors:

A couple of eyebrow-raisers in the June issue of *Interzone*...

I find Evelyn Lewes' articles interesting, but I wish she'd do her research properly. I spotted three factual errors concerning the Star Wars movies, most serious of which was the suggestion that they'd been renumbered.

As audio reviewer, I'm all too aware of the joys of listening to SF while washing up or making the tea. But if Ms Lewes wants to follow suit for her own column she really ought to think about installing a TV in her kitchen.

In Gary Westfahl's article we're informed that Mars is 234 million miles away from Earth during opposition. As it happens, Mars is close to opposition right now, and believe me, it wouldn't look so good in my new five inch telescope if it was more than 40-odd million miles away. Mr Westfahl is confusing opposition with conjunction, but it would make no sense for Klaatu to give the latter measurement, any more than you'd give a friend needlessly indirect directions to get to your house.

The theory that Martians are our parents is clearly in the "let's ignore the counter-evidence" category. (How many parents – even evil ones – chase their kids across Horsell Common with the intention of sucking their blood out?) More pertinently, Martians are generally Old People, whereas we are Children. My dad would not let me dig big holes in his garden but my granddad – like Ray Bradbury's Martians – was a lot more indulgent. If there's an analogy to be had (and even this is stretching it), the Martians are not our parents, they are our grandparents.

Paul Beardsley

paul.beardsley@snellwilcox.com

Dear Editors:

In *Interzone* 169 Evelyn Lewes continues to dig herself deeper into her pit of lost credibility.

What is the point of her reviewing programmes that she has obviously does not have time to watch, and the rest of us have seen and digested in their entire multi-season glory ages ago.

She insists on shooting from the hip on the basis of insufficient samples. She has a never-say-die attitude to criticism that is not warranted by her perceptive power. She wastes paper and ink on an embarrassing scale. The sooner you dispense with her services, the sooner she can join Gary Westfahl in the important task of writing the blurbs on dust jackets.

Simon Fedida

windjammer@cableinet.co.uk

Dear Editors:

A few words in defence of Ben Jeapes.

Ben, whom I know slightly through his work for the Milford Writers Conference, is someone to whom the epithet "perfect gentleman" might be accurately applied. The wrath that has been unleashed against him is based on a misinterpretation of his tone as being patronising, whereas he was in fact being ironic. This, I feel, is a reaction to the petulant attitude Evelyn Lewes seems to adopt in her articles.

Stuart Falconer

stuart@sfalco.plus.com

Dear Editors:

Re. Evelyn Lewes's column in *Interzone* #169.

Ms. Lewes complained of the use of mangled American English in *Babylon 5*. One example was "the last best hope" which she describes as "meaningless management mumbo-jumbo" and "barking". I had always believed that it was a quotation of Abraham Lincoln's and it took me 30 seconds on the internet to confirm that Lincoln did, in fact, say "We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of Earth." The quotation is so famous that the phrase "last best hope" has become a kind of shorthand in American speeches. For example, over the years, Ronald Reagan used it at least five times. Does Ms. Lewes actually do anything other than just spout off her opinion? I would hope for something a bit more considered and researched.

As to having "no way of checking at the moment" who the writers of *Babylon 5* were; correct me if I'm wrong, but

Ms. Lewes has a month to research and write her piece. It again took me less than a minute to find a website that listed details of every *Babylon 5* episode. Congratulations to Ms. Lewes for knowing that J. Michael Straczynski wrote many of the episodes, he didn't, however, write them all. The stats work out to 92 of 110 broadcast episodes or 84% of the total.

For those who may be interested, the other writers were :

- 3 "Born to the Purple" – Larry DiTillio
- 7 "The War Prayer" – D. C. Fontana
- 9 "Deathwalker" – Larry DiTillio
- 10 "Believers" – David Gerrold
- 11 "Survivors" – Mark Scott Zicree
- 12 "By Any Means Necessary" – Kathryn Drennan
- 14 "TKO" – Larry DiTillio
- 15 "Grail" – Christy Marx
- 16 "Eyes" – Larry DiTillio
- 17 "Legacies" – D. C. Fontana
- 26 "A Distant Star" – D.C. Fontana
- 27 "The Long Dark" – Scott Frost
- 28 "A Spider In The Web" – Lawrence G. DiTillio (presumably Larry to his friends)
- 29 "Soul Mates" – Peter David
- 32 "GROPOS" – Larry DiTillio
- 36 "There All The Honor Lies" – Peter David
- 39 "Knives" – Larry DiTillio
- 96 "Day Of The Dead" – Neil Gaiman

If I could check up on the above two points in a matter of minutes surely Ms. Lewes could. Whatever her opinions may be on a subject, her obvious lack of interest in doing a thorough job makes me less than inclined to take her arguments seriously.

I expect better from *Interzone*.

Dennis Lane

Pretoria, South Africa

dennislane999@hotmail.com

Dear Editors:

Having enjoyed the witty and personalised style of Evelyn's column, *IZ* 169 came as something akin to realising your learned guide up the Amazon has been navigating with a feng-shui compass!

It could have been an interesting exercise to see Evelyn's naïve reaction to *Babylon 5*'s spin-off movies given that she hasn't seen the show's full run. Instead we got shallow remarks about grammar and moral purpose. Both feel like cheap shots. Granted *Babylon 5* has its fair share of leaden lines but do we want to get into the turgid "to boldly go" debate?

Evelyn's remark about "moral uplift" simply spells out to me what a long shadow *Star Trek* has cast over TV space opera as a genre. *Babylon 5* has quite a different outlook and Evelyn sounds like a loyal consumer discovering that by mistake she bought Maxwell House not Nescafe.

interzone

Visit the
interzone
website today

You will find synopses of
issues, cover art, and
interesting links to a
detailed *Interzone* index,
to David Langford's
archived "Ansible Link"
columns, and to Gary
Westfahl's on-going
Biographical Encyclopedia
of SF Film.

www.sfsite.com/interzone

Full appreciation of *Babylon 5* comes with sequential viewing of the episodes; more so than in any other series (except perhaps *Twin Peaks*). I remember suddenly going through my pile of video tapes halfway through season one retrieving *B5* episodes I was about to record over. What had appeared to be stand-alone stories suddenly clicked with me as panels in an unfolding tapestry.

In other shows development occurs ad-hoc following audience reaction. In *Babylon 5* a host of elements turn out to be "pre-programmed" into the scenario. Many plot twists are boldly laid out in front of the viewer, yet we miss them till they are revealed. Despite the first two seasons coming from the hands of diverse writers JMS maintained a unifying authorial tone. *B5* is as close as any serial TV series will get to the supra-narrative effects of multiple volume books.

So go on Evelyn, give the "last best hope for peace" a chance :-)

Allan Toombs

cytania@yahoo.co.uk

Dear Editors:

It was with growing frustration that I read Evelyn Lewes' column in the July issue of *Interzone*. I wish I could take the time to write a longer, considered response, but I will endeavour to restrict my comments to a letter.

My blood pressure first began to rise when I came across her description of *Blake's 7* as "execrable". She suggests that *Blake's 7* and *Farscape* both suffer from having no "moral centre". As for *Farscape*, having only watched two or three episodes, and those out of sequence, I do not feel qualified to comment on the series at length. On *Blake's 7*, however, I am more than willing to comment. To suggest that the series had no moral centre is ridiculous – unless perhaps Ms. Lewes has only seen a few episodes from season four, when Avon has lost the moral anchor provided by Blake in earlier episodes, and faces fewer

moral dilemmas in his absence. Go back to seasons one and two for some blistering debates on the morality behind the terrorism indulged in by the crew. The early episodes revolve around determining who is morally right in their actions and decisions.

Having slammed *Farscape* on the evidence of half a season, Evelyn's assassination of *Babylon 5* was laughable. Her first mistake was to judge the carefully crafted arc-story, spread across five years and five seasons, by watching the four television movies instead. I don't presume to speak for *Babylon 5* fans in general, but personally I found these films boring, badly written, sentimental, and above all nothing like the series. Admittedly, the series can be sentimental, corny, badly acted and melodramatic by turns, but once you have applied the "made in America" filter to your perceptions, the overall story is engaging, interesting and ambitious in scope. The first season boasts some appalling episodes, but this is a five-year story finding its feet, building a fan base and gaining the confidence to tell the long story. This long story might be a standard coming-of-age for the human race, good versus evil saga, and totally derivative of *The Lord of the Rings*, but the reason this same story keeps on being told is that it is good and we like to hear it!

I must also disagree with Evelyn's objection to "exotic other species" which "make the human beings fade into the background". As she pointed out on the previous page of her article, "story-telling is human-focused". Her own account of the elves in *Elf Quest* who represent human beings is relevant here. The humans are central to *Babylon 5*. On several occasions, members of other races comment that only humans would bother to try to make the *Babylon* project work. The exotic aliens represent aspects of human nature, and enable the viewer to explore these aspects out of the context of present day culture and geopolitics. Her complaint that Mimbari

behaviour can be described as a "chain of illogic" demonstrates her own lack of understanding of the place of the alien in science fiction. Perhaps she should ask herself how she would portray a truly alien species. If the aliens' behaviour was predictable, just how alien would they be? Perhaps what comes over as "illogic" with a shallow reading might be better interpreted as unpredictable, unknown, misunderstood, mysterious – or alien. The "illogic" of the Mimbari surrender could be read as a representation of J. Michael Straczynski's common male inability to understand women, an idea supported by the eventual union of the leaders of the Human and Mimbari factions on *Babylon 5*.

Evelyn then goes on to suggest looking outside science fiction for a sense of wonder. I take she has not reached the *Babylon 5* episodes "The Fall of Night", "And the Rock Cried Out", "No Hiding Place", "Intersections in Real Time" and "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars". As for having no way of checking her *Babylon 5* facts, I suggest the Lurker's Guide to *Babylon 5* at www.midwinter.com. There are comprehensive episode reviews making full use of hypertext to jump you backwards and forwards through the episodes. Best of all, J. Michael Straczynski has commented on each of the episodes. I only wish Terry Nation or Chris Boucher had been able to leave behind such a resource for the decidedly un-execrable *Blake's 7*.

Rachel Churcher

(Graduate, MA in Science Fiction Studies, University of Liverpool)
Royston, Herts.

*Evelyn Lewes: It is gratifying to see so many comments on my work (even the more unpleasant ones who don't want to be published). Alas, there are too many good points to address individually, but I have been following the daily rerun of *Babylon 5* on the Sci-Fi channel, and I hope I will be able to respond satisfactorily in my next column.*



infinity plus
the sf, fantasy & horror archive

online since 1997

www.infinityplus.co.uk

Ian Watson
Bruce Bethke
Kim Stanley Robinson
M John Harrison
Michael Moorcock
Kim Newman
Molly Brown
Vonda N McIntyre

Ian McDonald
Paul J McAuley
David Langford
Garry Kilworth
James Patrick Kelly
Gwyneth Jones
Lisa Goldstein
Keith Brooke

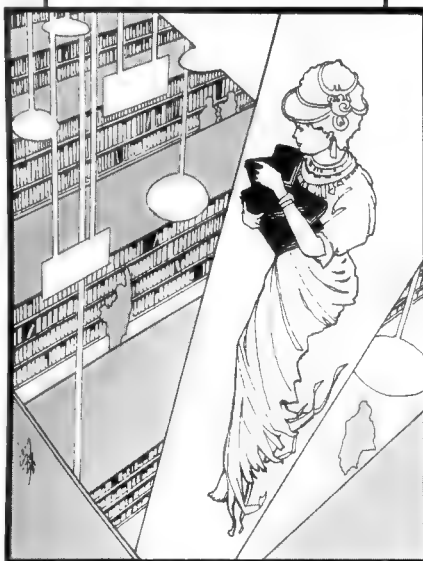
Mary Gentle
Jack Vance
Paul Di Filippo
Ted Chiang
Tony Daniel
Suzette Haden Elgin
Sarah Ash
Ian R MacLeod

Peter F Hamilton
Greg Egan
Eric Brown
Graham Joyce
Nicholas Royle
Terry Bisson
Stephen Baxter
...and many more

"first-rate" - Locus Online
"beautiful sf reprint site ... impressive stable of writers" - SF Age

"seriously cool" - Rodger Turner, Asimov's webmaster
"Looks great. And it's good to find quality fiction on the web!" - Ellen Datlow

"one of the best fiction sites on the web" - LineOne SF Club
"Looks great. And it's good to find quality fiction on the web!" - Ellen Datlow



REVIEWED

A Deeper Grail

Nick Gevers

With his fifth novel, *The Lightstone* (Voyager, £17.99 hc, £11.99 trade pb), David Zindell treads a new path at last, and a quite magnificent one. Virtually all of his previous work has concerned the Mystic Mathematicians of Neverness on the planet Icefall, rendering in immense poetic detail their fantastically intricate metaphysics, their susceptibility to the charisma of true and false messiahs, and their galactic wars and pilgrimages. Like a version of Frank Herbert wedded to the romanticism of Robert Silverberg and the baroque involutions of Gene Wolfe, Zindell has gifted sf with some of its greatest philosophical space operas and meditative planetary romances; but the universe of Neverness has been delineated to exhaustion, and a different cosmos beckons, and along with it a different genre. *The Lightstone* is a vast ornate quest fantasy, a reductive literary form that in Zindell's skilled hands shows a startling new vitality.

The Lightstone begins the Ea Cycle, which will extend to four or possibly more volumes; but the present novel is by and large self-contained, a quest brought full circle. Ea is a world-continent with a very deep history, a history whose progress, through several Ages and many millennia, has been a Fall from angelic grace to fragilely ennobled savagery. Numerous feudal kingdoms remember, in their souls as well as in their rituals and heraldic pronouncements, a time when their ancestors were Star People, blessed beings inhabiting a Golden

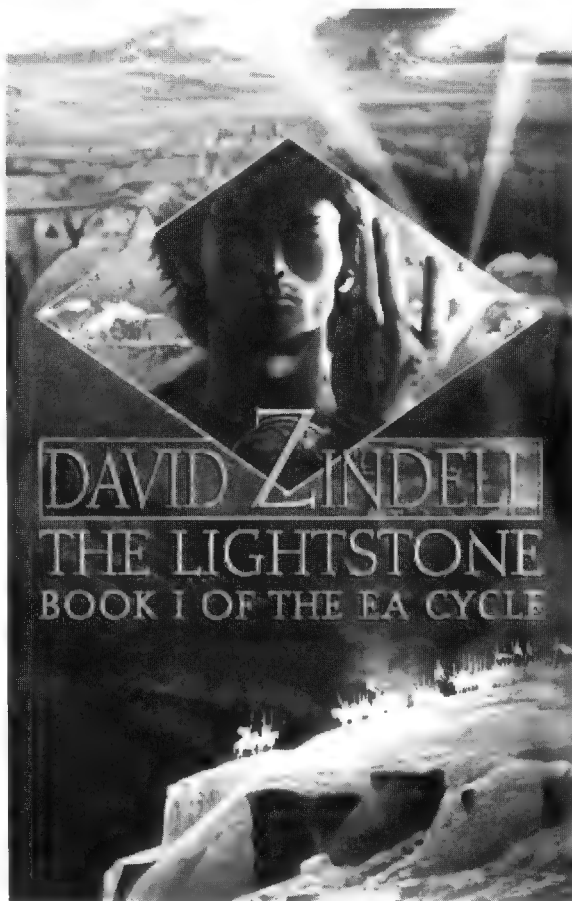
Age and aspiring to renewed membership of a stellar (and interstellar) civilization presided over by the mythic Galadin. Now, in the Age of the Dragon, the angels seem long gone, codes of chivalry barely restrain universal impulses towards ostentatious militarism, and a Dark Lord, Morjin, nicknamed the Red Dragon, is engulfing realm after realm with his doctrines of cruel self-

aggrandizement and ceremonial bloodlust. Despite the divisions and purblindness of his foes, hope exists, in the form of the Lightstone, a talisman of talismans bearing a highly uncoincidental resemblance to the Holy Grail; and a band of brave companions sets out to find it, through strange lands and ever-besetting dangers. Standard enough. But there is much more than the standard to *The Lightstone*...

Zindell certainly displays his allegiance to Tolkien in many ways; he tenders the obligatory resonances with scenes and characters out of Middle Earth, and he is proficient at suggesting the roots of our world in Ea, just as Tolkien implied the continuity of his Europe with Middle Earth. He is as conversant with the conventions and permutations of the quest narrative as was Tolkien, and paces it, and braids it about, with a lot of Tolkien's legendary expertise. So he has written a book admirers of Tolkien, and many consumers of Tolkien-aping literary cannon-fodder, will enjoy enormously. But he is a major sf writer, possessing an instinct for novelty and rigour at odds with genre fantasy's seemingly inevitable conservatism, and so, very much like George R. R. Martin in the latter's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, he does not simply write far more stylishly and interestingly than do his competitors; he innovates. In three

ways: he writes Science Fantasy while studiously avoiding any acknowledgement of so doing; he draws into the quest formula Asian ideas and codes of story-telling; and he garnishes his tale with a striking poetry of the spirit, a system of luminous metaphors that endows his text with a weight of meaning that matches its weight in pages. This is a rare accomplishment in a tome of this sort, the pretensions of such as Stephen Donaldson notwithstanding.

The Lightstone is Science Fantasy because it is set in a galaxy recognizable to physicists, and because its magics are also technologies. As Valashu Elahad and his comrades wander the sublimely terrifying landscapes of Ea, they ponder the existence of other stars and planets, knowing what these are, and speculating on who and what might inhabit those other worlds. They wield so-called gelstei, whose magical effects have unstated but definite science-fictional analogues: Prince Maram's firestone is basically a flamethrower (or, at higher settings, a nuclear weapon), and Liljana carries a telepathic transmitter. With these nods to the



sort of functional-terminological ambiguity exercised by Gene Wolfe in *The Book of the New Sun*, Zindell imports into his fantasy world a good deal of the conceptual inventiveness that encrusted his ambitious sf novels, and keeps his reader in thrilling oscillations between modes of genre thinking. And because he is blending his Occidentally linear plot with patterns and devices from South Asian myth and legend, a similar narrative uncertainty is galvanizingly present at a more fundamental level of reading: *The Lightstone* has inherited from the Neverness quartet a revisionist flexibility with archetypes that is consistently fascinating.

But ultimately *The Lightstone* is a resolutely timeless spiritual quest tale, and it must be judged as such. In these terms, the novel works very well: the interpersonal dynamics of its characters test them as much as their adventures do, with due psychological complexity and unpredictability; and Valashu Elahad narrates their inner agonies and ecstasies in a reflective, figuratively expressive prose that maps their subjective sensations to external phenomena with impressive accuracy. Zindell is a fine prose poet, and his lyric metaphors are especially suited to evoking the fraught serenity that seems to be Ea's governing mood. Valashu unburdens himself and his world with a considered crystalline clarity in *The Lightstone*, and David Zindell does likewise, quite magisterially, through him.

Nick Gevers

Enchantments of Wonder and Delight

Iain Emsley

Storm Constantine's *Way of Light* (Gollancz, £17.99 hc, £10.99 pb) completes the "Chronicles of Magravandias." She has created a high Gothic epic that moves from the courts of Malagash and their intrigues to the rugged land of Caradore, influenced by the elements, weaving a rich tale of magic and intrigue.

After the death of the Emperor of Magravandias, Valraven Palindrake finds himself protecting his family from the inter-familial wars whilst supporting Gastern, the legitimate heir. However, various cabals have different ideas about the succession. Tatrini, the empress, favours her other son, Bayard, but recognizes that she must control the Crown of Silence, to be worn by the True King. However, others feel that it is time for the Sea Dragon Heir to regain his own heritage, which will lead him into direct conflict with the Malagash Empire. Taropat (the magus who was involved in the search for the Crown of Silence) kidnaps Varencienne (Valraven's wife), forcing Valraven into returning to Caradore and the raising of Foy, the Sea Dragon whom he had originally rejected.

Whereas magic is dealt with in an offhand fashion in many fantasy novels, Constantine weaves

powerful forms of magic that depend upon personal sacrifice. In *Sea Dragon Heir*, Foy took the life of Pharinet and was put to rest by Valraven, who denied the Caradorean legacy that is linked to the Sea Dragon. In *Crown of Silence*, those involved in the Lakes Quest had to give up various physical artefacts to gain the crown, though Taropat kept his own object and is thus prevented from feeling truly complete. Valraven and Taropat begin to come to terms with their own lack of sacrifice, moving towards the resurrection of Caradore through the reunion of the four elements. Although attempting to reunite the four elements, Tatrini puts her own outlook onto the matter, placing her own subjects into roles that cannot be controlled by them.

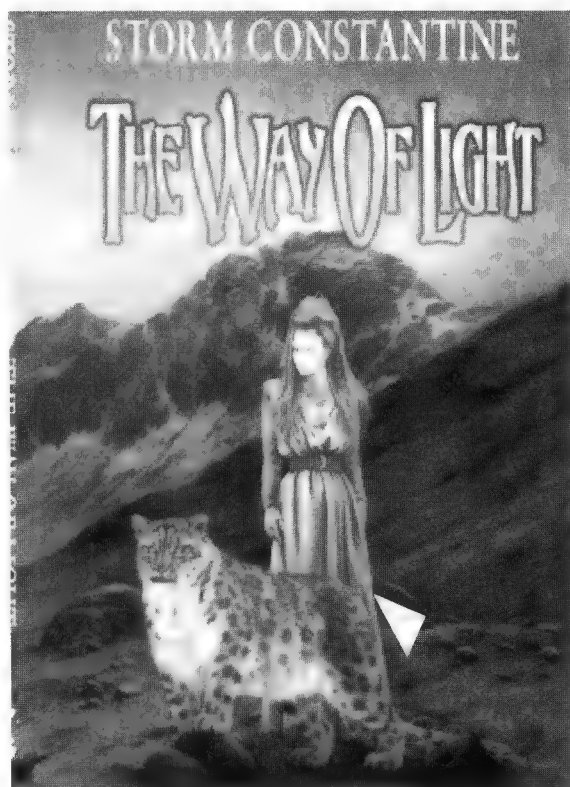
Constantine also completes the mundane, political struggles that have motivated each character. Having returned the power to Caradore, Valraven sets about eliminating the Malagash family, while the factions that surround the Malagash jockey for position in the new order. The restoration of political power harks back to the prologue of *Sea Dragon Heir*, bringing a sense of full closure to the trilogy.

As the novel moves between Malagash and Caradore, Storm Constantine unifies the stories that were set up between *Sea Dragon Heir* and *Crown of Silence*. She brings together the dualistic worlds that set this trilogy apart from much epic fantasy. With its rich characters and complex plotting, *Way of Light* provides a thrilling conclusion.

Jacqueline Carey's novel *Kushiel's Dart* (Tor, \$25.95) is a truly astonishing debut, bringing a rich pageant of sensual characters to the high intrigue of an Elizabethan court. It is somewhat difficult to ignore the glowing, but deserved, advance praise that this book has gathered from authors such as Storm Constantine and Emma Bull.

Phèdre nó Delauney has been indentured to the house of Anafiel Delauney, in the full knowledge that she bears Kushiel's dart, a fleck in her eye, that marks her out as an *anguisette*, a masochistic prostitute invested with an amazing tolerance for pain and remarkable healing powers. Delauney uses Phèdre to spy on the aristocracy to discover the truth about the plotting which aims to overthrow the monarchy of Terre D'Ange, but loses his life as he discovers too much. Phèdre is captured and sold into slavery, and then uses her skills to bring the plot to the Empress's attention.

Although Jacqueline Carey delivers a strong plot, full of rich characters,

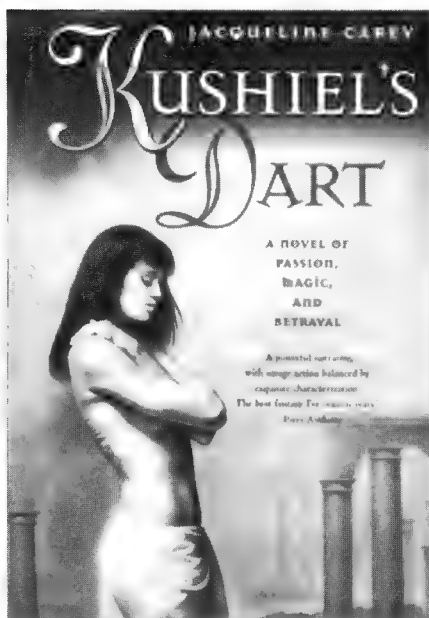


there is one passage that concerns the Master of the Sea that fails to deliver the same standard of writing as the rest of the novel.

She manages to remove one of the major characters here but this section appears to be a hook for a future novel and ill fits with the current narrative.

However, Carey's descriptions are rich and sensual, bringing the decadent society gloriously to life. The intrigue that she artfully delivers, with its subtle feints and bluffs, and the full development of her characters, both keep this reader's interest alive. *Kushiel's Dart* marks out Carey as an interesting writer to watch in future. Her debut delivers a complex novel with a pace that rarely flags, drawing the reader through scenes that are by turns lush and barren.

Children of the Shaman by Jessica Rydill (Orbit, £7.99) is an almost equally interesting debut novel. Annat and Malchik leave their childhood home for the city, to be reunited with their father, Yuda, who is a healer. Together they travel to the town of Gard Ademar, where they become involved with a series of murders and disappearances as they stay with Govorin, the sheriff, and his wife, Casilidis. The townsfolk have been trying to construct a rail tunnel under the forest but have tapped into the kingdom of La Souterraine. After a tussle with Sarl, the Deputy Sheriff, our protagonists enter the kingdom using a steam train. But the world is out of balance – the Bright Goddess has been banished in favour of the Cold One. As the inhabitants of the Castle Ademar try to undermine the efforts of the travellers through kidnap and torture, the small group finds itself caught in a world of



folklore made real.

The main strength of this novel is that it draws upon a variety of cultures and folklore, drawing heavily, though not exclusively, from the cauldron of tales that is Middle Europe and the Slavic countries. Annat and her family are clearly drawn from Jewish lore, and here Jessica Rydill is able to bring in the mysticism associated with Judaism, as well as various day-to-day customs. In La Souterraine the characters meet an exiled Wandering family, who have constructed a Golem to protect their house from the Doxoi (Christian) inhabitants of Castle Ademar. The Cold One appears to be drawn from the Snow Queen, who uses an ice seed to poison her victims and bind them to her. Eventually there is a joyous sense of regaining the balance, of a multitude of powers from different sources.

Ultimately, Annat, Govorin's daughter, gains the most from the journey. As they journey deeper into the heart of the forest, she takes centre stage from her father as she learns how to use her power and become a shaman like him. However, Rydill balances this with the story of Annat's relationship with Casilidis, who becomes a mentor, giving her an emotional development that Malchik lacks. He is seen to be a slight disappointment to his father, and so succumbs most easily to the various traps laid for him.

Children of the Shaman is a fantastic read, drawing from the essence of a variety of cultures, subtly interweaving plots and characters, whilst recreating some wonderful lands. While this is a deeply traditional fantasy, it is also a compelling read with well-realized characters and lands, vigorously retreading many familiar paths.

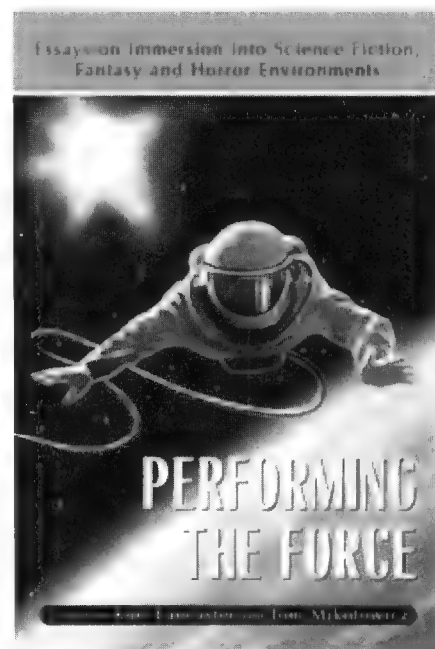
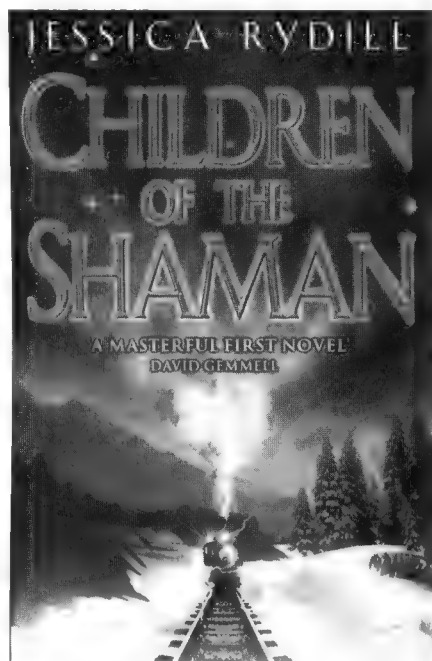
Iain Emsley

SF as Performance

Tim Robins

Performing the Force: Essays on Immersion into Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Environments (McFarland, \$32) is a provocative collection of student work examining the place of genre-related material in everyday life. The collection is edited by Kurt Lancaster and Tom Mikotowicz, who deserve admiration for the sheer audacity of getting undergraduate essays into print.

The book arises from a performance studies course taught by Kurt Lancaster at New York University. I don't know the precise content of the course, but noting the scholars most frequently cited in this book, it would appear to comprise of Richard Schechner's performance theory, Erving Goffman's frame analysis and



Roland Barthes' semiotics. Lancaster seems to have set an assignment that encouraged students to apply these theorists' works to their own media consumption. This has resulted in essays on toys (*Thundercats*, *He-man* and the *Masters of the Universe* and *Star Wars* figures), websites (*The Blair Witch Project*, *The X-Files*, *Godzilla*), wargames and role-playing games (*Warhammer*, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Cyberpunk 2020*). Also, there are accounts of celebrity cults surrounding Robert Jordan, George Lucas and Chris Carter among others.

My gut reaction to this student work was to grade it. Encouraging students to apply theories to their own examples is a first-rate teaching method. But much of the work here could only reasonably scrape a C grade because it is descriptive and often uncritical of the theories employed. Also, the book's chapters are peppered with breezy generalities: "Since the beginning of time, humans have sought to assume other characters," "stars and celebrities are created and adored throughout the world," and the groan-inducing "Words are powerful tools containing hidden meanings in words or phrases – affecting us so greatly that they actually construct our reality." This kind of writing just brings out the pedant in me.

Jennifer Anderson's "Man and Myth: Social Implications of Chris Carter and *The X-Files*" opens with the following set of assertions: "On Sunday evenings, nationwide twenty million people stop whatever they are doing and sit for one sacred hour in front of the television. They stop otherwise normal lives to immerse themselves into *The X-Files*." But watching television is about as normal an activity as I can imagine. The figure of 20 million viewers stopping whatever they are doing to watch the show is less impressive if what most of that 20 million were doing was watching the previous television programme. More to the point, do 20 million people have the same sacred viewing experience? It is here that performance theory could be informed by developments in the academic study of television audiences: that is, actually talking to audiences and listening to their accounts of their pleasures.

If this book exhibits a lack of the kind of caution appropriate to scholarly work, then, to be fair, the editors carefully avoid describing the contributors as scholars. Instead, they are "author fans." This is an interesting distinction. Fans are often attributed with qualities that are opposed to those of an academic. Where fans are involved, academics are distant, where fans feel,

academics think. But it seems to me that Lancaster's course is designed to break down these distinctions, so it is a shame the editors feel the need to resurrect them. Perhaps they are trying to protect the students (and by implication the book) from academic judgment. But the writers are fan-scholars who are learning to perform academic work. It is this that gives the book its genuine sense of discovery, its originality and interest.

As for the theoretical basis of the essays, I am still unfamiliar with Schechner's work and can no longer hold off reading it. Lancaster and Mikotowicz give a brief description of its main tenets in their introduction. Consumers act out scenarios implicit in fictional worlds, extending or inventing stories and putting them into practice, for instance, playing a video game, engaging in role-playing or writing fiction in fanzines. These performances involve different frameworks. Frameworks are structured ways of understanding the world that help make events meaningful. To a greater or lesser extent the chapters apply frame analysis to examples of performance.

Performance theory is making some headway into cultural and media studies. An important aspect of Lancaster's and his colleagues' work is their focus on often neglected and vilified activities: reading comics, playing games, watching science fiction. Performance theory's model of the participants in such activities has them caught between the pole of Brechtian estrangement (at which they adopt a critical, cognitive understanding of a performance) and the pole of shamanistic trance (at which they become totally and passionately immersed in a performance). This

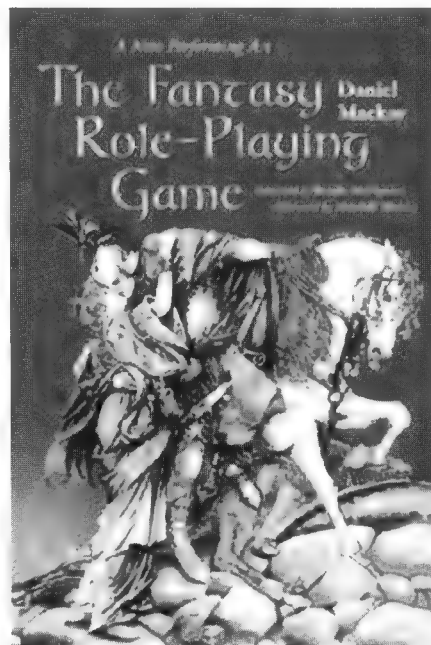
doesn't work for me. There are forms of audience engagement that don't fit between these poles, distraction being one of them.

The almost total evacuation of any kind of political critique from these essays is a difficulty of a different kind. A notable exception in this collection is Daniel Mackay's work, "Star Wars: The Magic of the Anti-Myth" (reprinted from *Foundation*). This discusses the art of *Star Wars* exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum and shows how academic work was co-opted to give cultural authority to a Hollywood-derived commodity.

Daniel Mackay is given wider scope in his own MacFarland book: *The Fantasy Role-Playing game: A New Performing Art* (\$32). I must confess that I have never role-played in the fantasy-gaming sense of the word. I dimly remember my brother buying me a *Dungeons & Dragons* boxed set sometime in the late 1970s. In the event, I couldn't overcome my embarrassment at being asked to give voice to a gloomily countenanced, spectral mirror and the box was never opened again. However, some of my best friends are role-players (no, honestly, it's true) and role-playing seems more popular than ever.

Role-playing may be fun and sociable but is it art? Mackay's answer is yes, and his account goes a long way towards explaining what for me is the most mystifying aspect of the game: ask role-players about role-playing and what you are likely to get is a long account of the story constructed during play. Mackay argues that such stories are the distinctive way in which role-playing games are transformed into aesthetic objects. Players' collective recollections of past games distil all the activities that surround them in complex, ongoing narratives. Mackay provides a good example of this with his own recollection of a game he played: *Die Skurgen*. This was set in *The Time of Troubles*, *The Land of Always*, *The Demi-plane of Dread* and other heavily capitalized realms. The game involved five nobodies who became somebodies by sharing an adventure which sounds suspiciously like a re-enactment of the American dream.

While talking about a game creates the game as an object, the point of a game is to play it. Mackay argues that playing is a way to construct one's self, "the enchantment of the game is the gamesmen's own engrossment in themselves." What remains strange is the why this experience is then backgrounded in recollections of the game. Mackay himself begins his book with an attempt to evoke the context



of his own role-playing: a basement cluttered with Polyhedron dice, soda cans and Dorito bags. But he isn't interested in this stuff. As a role-player, it's the narrative that matters.

MacKay does provide a brief history of role-playing games. Amazingly, a founder of role-playing was a founder of science fiction – H. G. Wells. It appears he adapted a highly abstract Prussian strategy exercise designed for the military into a parlour game with toy figures. Of course, I don't imagine even Wells could have predicted the next mutation: a genetic splicing with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* to produce tabletop Epic Pooh (if I may borrow Moorcock's pejorative label for pastoral fantasies).

What astounds me most about modern games companies is their attempt to copyright folkloric figures such as mummies, vampires and werewolves. Every rulebook seems to be an invidious effort to convert the popular imagination into an intellectual property for commercial exploitation. Mackay is aware of this commercial context. His argument is that, in the absence of religious or secular authorities with which to identify, role-playing offers the possibility of Romantic identification with a moral universe. But complete identification/subordination is not possible because players know only too well that this universe is constructed by themselves and by companies. As a result, players flicker between immersion in the entertainment environment and a critical distance from it. This opens up the possibility for players to understand the unsatisfactory lifestyle choices made available by capitalism as a surrogate for less alienated social relations.

Gary Gygax, author and co-creator of *Dungeons & Dragons* has argued, "There's a message contained in the true role-playing game. It is the message of the difficulty of surviving alone." As well as co-operation, role-playing games seem to construct worlds around a sense of cosmic justice, a kind of popular belief in the fairness of things that has no reality outside of fiction. So, "a cleric is capable in combat, and can cast spells, but must obey a stringent ethos." This kind of balancing act reminds me of the popular misconception that people who are blind have extraordinary powers of hearing (it's only fair). In real life "a cleric has great knowledge, can command authority, can abuse children and still keep his job."

Of course this world of fairness is typical of other fictional forms.

And players don't necessarily play along. One friend of mine enjoys playing irredeemably evil characters; another enjoys thwarting his fellow players. Apparently the role of scout provides ample opportunity to locate gold and steal it before other players enter the room. It seems this new performance art offers some familiar pleasures. I would have liked to have heard from more actual players. To what extent do players recognize, support or contest games' moral universes? Also, Mackay talks about an aesthetic structure, but some account of how that structure is organized and embodied would have been useful. Just what are the distinctions and hierarchies of taste that operate within the role-playing universe?

Role-playing may well be given a boost by the new film of *The Lord of the Rings*. Until I see otherwise, I am assuming the three-part adaptation will be the usual disappointment. On film, fantasy has the habit of becoming mere fancy dress. Tolkien's work still has a massive following, as evidenced by T. A. Shippey's **J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century** (HarperCollins, £7.99; also now available in an American hardcover edition from Houghton Mifflin – completists take note).

The century is the 20th and while the statistical bases for Shippey's

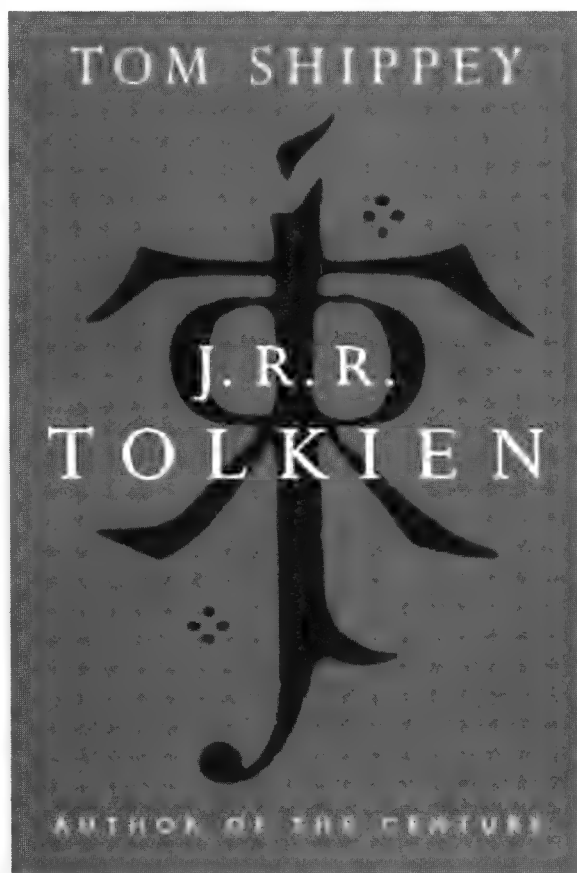
claim are suspect that's the only thing that is in an otherwise authoritative, scholarly and accessible examination of Tolkien's fiction. Where the current cold wind of cultural studies leaves its object of study frozen to death in a blizzard of theory, Shippey's close reading is like a refreshing breeze on a clear summer's day. The book's scope is wide: from *The Hobbit* (a book I laboured over in school) to *The Lord of the Rings* (a book I have never finished) to *The Silmarillion* (a book I couldn't bring myself to read) and all points beyond and in between. But even my hardened heart felt lifted by Shippey's account.

Like many others, I was familiar with Tolkien the prep-school boy legend: he was a teacher and, bored with marking essays, scribbled down the words, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." This story, told I am sure by secondary-school teachers the world over to enhance the status of their profession, is significant in what it leaves out – Tolkien the holder of two Oxford Chairs, Tolkien the scholar of Old and Middle English, Tolkien the translator of *Beowulf*, and Tolkien the academic who eschewed academic publishing in favour of "a long mad book." By such omissions is genius made.

Shippey tells us that in the academic sphere Tolkien was relatively unproductive and earned the dismay and scorn of his colleagues. But, as Shippey makes clear, Tolkien's fiction was scholarship carried out by other means. Chapters carefully tease out the way Tolkien incorporated debates about philology, Anglo-Saxon mythology and the nature of evil into his work. I particularly enjoyed Shippey's extrapolations on the origin of character and place names (Sackville-Baggins deriving from *cul de sac*).

In terms of empirical literary studies, Shippey's approach is radical. It is speculative and interpretive. It focuses on popular fiction and tries to explain this popularity. It doesn't succeed only in so far as the causes of popularity reside in forces related but extrinsic to the books themselves. I attempted Tolkien at a time when reprints of Robert E. Howard's Conan stories and the gatefold sleeves of prog-rock groups were fuelling the pastoral fantasy explosion. Practitioners of cultural studies would attempt a wider understanding of such historical formations, but would probably bury the book under a mountain of postmodern theory. Shippey has a lighter touch. All academic books should be this well written.

Tim Robins



An exhaustive account of all previous *Planet of the Apes* movies crash-lands onto my desk, fuelled by the new Tim Burton take on the concept. ***Planet of the Apes Revisited*** (St Martin's Griffin, \$19.95) by Joe Russo and Larry Landsman with Edward Gross, soon sinks under its own weight of facts, despite its sharp nose-cone – a pointed introduction by Charlton Heston. Like the astronauts in the first movie, I've been transported to a dislocating place, an upside-down world where the dumb now rule – Planet Hollywood.

As the authors admit, this book is a labour of love. They detail their childhood fascination with *Planet of the Apes* over a long introduction, setting the tone for what follows. No minutiae are left out: for example, Joe Russo's grandmother was a book-keeper at the local cinema, so he got to see the "Apes" films as often as he wanted...

This introduction left me with little faith that the text would be an objective critical appraisal of the *Planet of the Apes* movies. This is a book by fans, for fans. Gold stars must be awarded for research, for gaining access to everyone involved in making the saga, from Charlton Heston and Natalie Trundy, the widow of Apes Guru Arthur P. Jacobs, to Special Effects people, Make-Up, and even bit-part actors involved. Dates of filming, locations, and an analysis of the musical scores of each of the films are given. Each film's chronicle ends with a selection of reviews published at the time; these are interesting to read, written as they are without the hindsight of later movie instalments.

Quite properly, a third of the book deals with the first movie, *Planet of the Apes* (1968). Critics and fans agree that this is the summit of the series. The story of how film producer Arthur P. Jacobs was captivated by Pierre Boulle's 1963 novel *La Planète des Singes*, how Jacobs convinced Charlton Heston to join his project (although Paul Newman was his first choice), the various permutations that the script went through with *Twilight Zone* writer Rod Serling, and the difficulties in filming Boulle's novel, all make fascinating reading. Much is explained, in the participants' own words, of decisions that set the course of subsequent movies.

Yet too much background material is included, some distracting to the narrative – film credits of actors and

Monkeying Around

Nigel Brown

directors would have been better relegated to an appendix – some details are distasteful. Do we really need a blow-by-blow account of Arthur P. Jacobs's fatal heart attack? One line would do. Instead, we get 19 lines, relating who found Jacob's "lifeless body," ending with "And when I came in, he was dead."

The later movies are dealt with in turn, each section revealing further facts about filming, actors' experiences and evolution of scripts as the producers were increasingly desperate to match, or at least

complement, the innovations of the first movie.

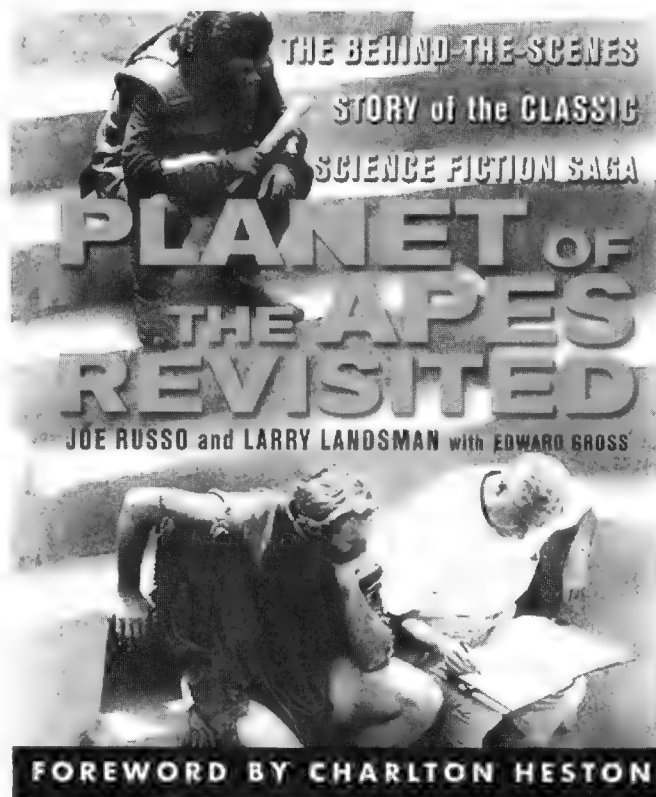
The text is liberally scattered with behind-the-scenes photographs, the most stunning of which features a shot from a previously unknown deleted scene at the beginning of the third movie, *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971). Taken from the inside of the spacecraft, it reveals the three apes in spacesuits seated at its controls, witnessing the destruction of Earth that ended the second movie, *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970). This linking scene never made it to the finished cut, despite a day's worth of shooting. The authors speculate that, in the days before computer graphics, this scene was too expensive to complete. Maybe. Associate Producer Frank Capra Jr. says that this space scene "...just didn't seem to fit... by beginning in space, people might have been expecting a different kind of film." This consideration never spoiled the first movie. It would have reinforced the role-reversal aspect of the third movie, compared with the first, which made it the best movie sequel of the series.

The authors underrate the 14-episode TV series (1974), although they still give it the comprehensive treatment enjoyed by the movies – the episode guide is particularly useful, and belies their assertion that the show "was a classic example of repetition." I was impressed to see that they even cover the 1975 cartoon series; I agree with them about the "God-awful animation" which one had to battle past to appreciate the more ambitious stories on offer.

Must I mention the last chapter? So obviously included as a puff-piece on Tim Burton's new *Planet of the Apes* movie... it's the *raison d'être* of this book, a sneaky bit of movie-merchandising. I suppose it's acceptable as its enabled what has gone before to struggle into print, as long as one doesn't read it. The interminable Hollywood twists and trails leading up to the new movie only irritate, they don't appetite. By the time I was informed in detail of the security arrangements on-set to keep the script a secret, I was too drowned in detail to throw the book aside in disgust at being shortchanged.

Could this book have been better researched? No. Better edited? Definitely! Like Charlton Heston's spaceship in the first movie, it should be rescued from the murk and relaunched as a sleeker vessel.

Nigel Brown



BOOKS RECEIVED



JULY
2001

This is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anderson, Poul. **Mother of Kings.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87448-0, 444pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; possibly the final novel by this major American sf-and-fantasy author, whose death has just been announced as we go to press; it's based on Norse legend, as was his last novel in similar vein, *War of the Gods* [Tor, 1997].) September 2001.

Anthony, Piers. **How Precious Was That While: An Autobiography.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87464-2, 352pp, hardcover, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, \$25.95. (Memoir by a popular sf/fantasy writer, first edition; it's a follow-up to an earlier, similar volume entitled *Bio of an Ogre* [1988], and concentrates for the most part on the last 15 years of Anthony's life.) 25th July 2001.

Anthony, Ray. **Empress.** "Two women share the same destiny – to rule mankind." Ace [PO Box 10289, London SW17 9ZF], ISBN 0-9526287-1-6, 412pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £6.99. (Sf novel, first edition; although this is a small-press product, possibly self-published [with an unfortunate choice of publisher name, since "Ace" already exists as a well-known American imprint], the book is a fully professional paperback, with a cover by a known sf artist; the Jamaican-born British author, Ray

Anthony [born 1958], has already written at least one "contemporary" novel, *Interface*, and a non-fiction book, *Thinking Man's Guide to Pregnancy, Childbirth & Fatherhood*, but this is his first work of sf.) 17th August 2001.

Banks, Iain M. **Look to Windward.** Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-059-8, 403pp, B-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £7.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2000; the latest "Culture" novel, its title deriving from the same two lines of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* as that of Banks's earlier sf novel, *Consider Phlebas*; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 165.) 16th August 2001.

Barclay, James. **Nightchild: Chronicles of the Raven.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-07215-6, 432pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; for some odd reason, it doesn't say "Book Three" anywhere on the packaging, but "Chronicles of the Raven: Book Three" it is, following *Dawnthief* [1999] and *Noonshade* [2000]; David Langford described the first in the trilogy as a "ripping yarn," and the publishers regard James Barclay as "the natural heir to David Gemmell.") 19th July 2001.

Barclay, James. **Noonshade.** "Chronicles of the Raven." Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-786-1, 484pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 2000.) 21st July 2001.

Barker, Clive. **Coldheart Canyon.** "A Hollywood Ghost Story." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-255864-5, ix+606pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; this seems to be Barker's first new novel since *Galilee: A Romance* [1998] – and it's the first of his in a long time that this compiler feels an urge to read, concerning as it does the lore and legend of Hollywood, a subject which Liverpool boy Barker should know well after 15 years residence there; perhaps this will be his equivalent of Armistead Maupin's *Maybe the*

Moon [1992], or Theodore Roszak's underrated *Flicker* [1991]?) 6th August 2001.

Barlough, Jeffrey E. **The House in the High Wood: A Story of Old Talbotshire. Volume Two of the Western Lights Series.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00841-0, 318pp, trade paperback, cover by Aleta Jenks, \$14.95. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; we didn't see the first in this series [entitled *Dark Sleeper*], and we haven't heard of the author, but he appears to have a small-press background and to be an American of the Gaslight-Romantic, Anglophile sort; although apparently set in an imaginary world, the tale is full of off-key Anglicisms – county names like "Talbotshire" and dialogue lines such as "I'd jolly forgotten about her," said the squire, lazily" [p121]; *Kirkus Reviews* said of his previous book: "If Arthur Conan Doyle and H. P. Lovecraft had collaborated on a novel, the result might have been like this"; steampunker Tim Powers also offers some words of praise.) August 2001.

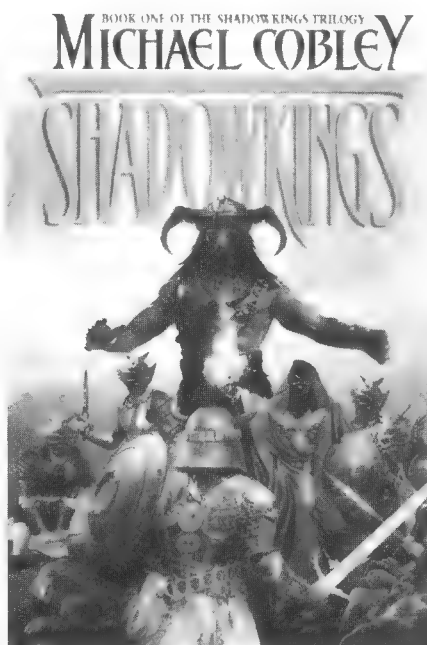
Baxter, Stephen. **Space: Manifold 2.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651183-X, 455pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2000; the second in the author's ongoing "Manifold" hard-sf sequence; parts of this one first appeared as separate stories in the U.S. magazine *Science Fiction Age*, and in Peter Crowther's 1999 anthology *Moonshots*; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 162.) 6th August 2001.

Berg, Carol. **Transformation.** "Book One of The Rai-Kirah." Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-044-X, 506pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2000; a debut novel by a new, but not young, American writer [born 1948].) 23rd August 2001.

Bova, Ben. **The Precipice: The Asteroid Wars, I.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-76961-0, 439pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Harrison, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2001; having done the Moon, Mars, Venus and Jupiter, Bova moves on to the Asteroids.) 16th August 2001.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer, and Deborah J. Ross. **The Fall of Neskaya: Book One of the Clingfire Trilogy.** "A Novel of Darkover." DAW, ISBN 0-7564-0034-1, 431pp, hardcover, cover by Romas Kukalis, \$24.95. (Sf/fantasy sharecrop novel, first edition; now that Marion Zimmer Bradley is safely out of the way [died 1999], it seems that her erstwhile friends and collaborators are reviving her "Darkover" series of planetary romances, which began very modestly as halves of Ace Doubles in the early 1960s; this one, no doubt 100% written by Deborah Ross, is copyrighted to "The Marion Zimmer Bradley Literary Works Trust.") July 2001.

Bunch, Chris, and Allan Cole. **Sten 6: The Return of the Emperor.** "Over one million Sten books sold worldwide." Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-081-4, 344pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; fifth



in a decade-old paperback-original space-opera series, now appearing in the UK for the first time.) *2nd August 2001.*

Cadigan, Pat. **Dervish is Digital.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85377-7, 230pp, hardcover, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2000; a follow-up to *Tea from an Empty Cup* [1999], concerning the further adventures of policewoman Doré Konstantin in an artificial reality-dominated future; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 169.) *30th July 2001.*

Clough, Brenda W. **Doors of Death and Life.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87550-9, 268pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 2000; follow-up to *How Like a God* [Tor, 1997], and described by its publishers as "part political thriller, part family drama, part fantasy, part near-future SF... an exciting and thoughtful excursion into X-Files territory.") *25th July 2001.*

Cobley, Michael. **Shadowkings.** "Book One of the Shadowkings Trilogy." Earthlight, ISBN 0-7432-0717-3, 372pp, C-format paperback, cover by Steve Stone, £10. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut novel – a well-written stab at Big Commercial Fantasy, by the looks of it – by a Glasgow-resident British writer who has been around for a while: his work has appeared in small-press magazines and anthologies for over a decade, and he contributed a story, "Corrosion," to *Interzone* 65, November 1992.) *26th July 2001.*

Datlow, Ellen, ed. **Vanishing Acts: A Science Fiction Anthology.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86961-4, 380pp, trade paperback, cover by Cliff Nielson, \$14.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 2000; it contains mainly new stories on the timely theme of endangered species, by M. Shayne Bell, Michael Cadnum, Ted Chiang [a 55-pager], Joe Haldeman, Paul J. McAuley, A. R. Morlan, David J. Schow, Brian Stableford, Mark W. Tiedemann and others – plus a few reprints, by Suzy McKee Charnas, Avram Davidson, Karen Joy Fowler and Bruce McAllister; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 158.) *25th July 2001.*

Dozois, Gardner. **Strange Days: Fabulous Journeys with Gardner Dozois.** Edited by Tim Szczesuil and Ann Broomhead. Introduction by Michael Swanwick. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701, USA], ISBN 1-886778-26-4, 540pp, hardcover, cover by Stephen Youll, \$30. (Sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; "published on behalf of Millennium Philcon, the 2001 World Science Fiction Convention, for their Guest of Honor, Gardner Dozois," this fine fat volume contains some 22 Dozois stories, several of them written in collaboration with others, plus an interesting 70-page "Travel Diary" by him; there are also short appreciative introductions to the pieces by a host of well-known writers – Stephen

Baxter, Michael Bishop, Pat Cadigan, Jack Dann, Joe Haldeman, Nancy Kress, George R. R. Martin, Paul McAuley, Kim Stanley Robinson, Robert Silverberg, Connie Willis and others; a well-made *festschrift*.) *31st August 2001.*

Engh, M. J. **Arslan.** "A classic of political science fiction." Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-87910-5, 296pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1976; an intense psychological drama about a future world-conqueror; this is an oft-overlooked minor classic of the field which originally slipped out as an obscure paperback original by an unknown author in the mid-1970s; it was last reissued in the UK as *A Wind from Bukhara* [Grafton Books, 1989], and it's good to see it reprinted now in Mary Jane Engh's homeland; if you appreciated Mary Renault's fine historical novels about Alexander the Great, you'll probably like this too.) *17th July 2001.*

Feist, Raymond E., and William R. Forstchen. **Honoured Enemy.** "Legends of the Rift-war." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224718-6, 323pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 2001; "from two of fantasy's greatest authors," says the blurb; well, Feist is certainly a bestseller in the Big Commercial Fantasy field, but it's news to us that Forstchen ranks as one of "fantasy's greatest authors" – isn't he best known for Baen Books-type military sf, and for having co-written Newt Gingrich's [remember him?] alternate-history novel, 1945?) *6th August 2001.*

Flynn, Michael. **In the Country of the Blind.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87444-8, 428pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Sf novel, first published in

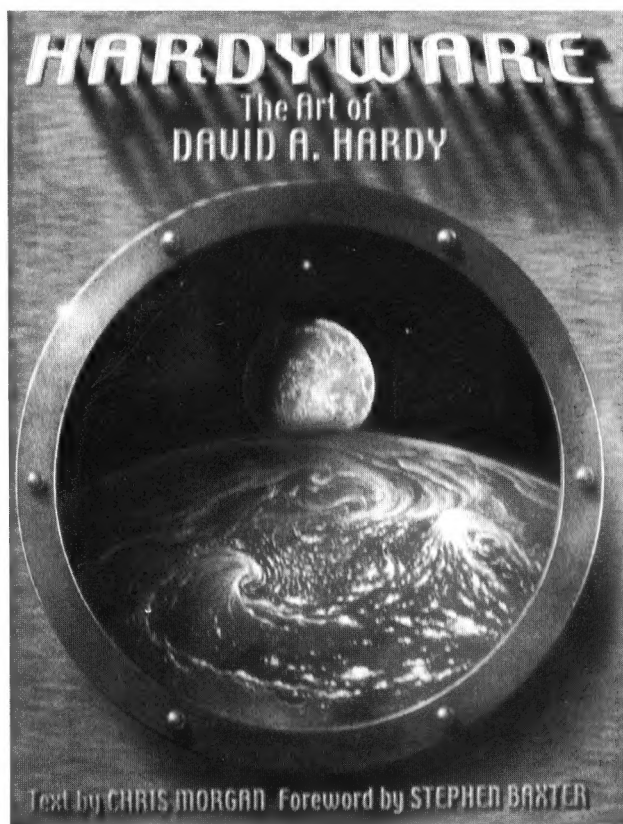
the USA, 1990; Flynn's debut novel, this new edition is "revised for its first hardcover appearance"; *Locus's* reviewer described the original version as "a white-knuckle roller-coaster ride of a conspiracy thriller, chock full of alternate history, mathematical prediction, and philosophical speculation"; there is an author's afterword, reprinted from *Analog*, which discusses at considerable length, with graphs and diagrams and equations, the ideas of the novel.) *August 2001.*

Fujiwara, Chris. **Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall.** Foreword by Martin Scorsese. Johns Hopkins University Press [2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218, USA], ISBN 0-8018-6561-1, xii+328pp, trade paperback, £12.95. (Illustrated critical study of the career and films of a leading horror-movie director; first published in the USA, 1998; this is a paperback reissue dated 2000, with British price and release date provided; the French-born Tourneur [1904-1977], son of Maurice Tourneur [also a fine director], was one of Hollywood's best – he directed *Cat People* [1942] and *Night of the Demon* [1957], among many others in various genres – and this looks to be a solid appreciation of his subtle, atmospheric work.) *2nd July 2001.*

Greenberg, Martin H., and John Helfers, eds. **The Mutant Files.** DAW, ISBN 0-7564-0004-X, 320pp, A-format paperback, cover by Koeveks, \$6.99. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains 16 all-new tales on the theme of "mutants among us," by David Bischoff, Charles de Lint, Brendan DuBois, Alan Dean Foster, Karen Haber, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Tanya Huff, Lisanne Norman, Jody Lynn Nye, Kristine Kathryn Rusch and others; it's one of a long series of such paperback-original sf, fantasy and horror anthologies produced under Greenberg's aegis for DAW Books; as we've said before... since they seem to appear monthly, consist of all-original material, offer opportunities to new writers, and are cheaply published [in today's terms], it's tempting to think of this sequence of books as constituting a latter-day pulp magazine – each "issue" of which is pleasingly thick, just as the early pulps were.) *August 2001.*

Greenberg, Martin H., and Alexander Potter, eds. **Assassin Fantastic.** DAW, ISBN 0-7564-0002-3, 308pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jody Lee, \$6.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains 15 all-new tales on assassination themes, by Teresa Edgerton, Rosemary Edghill, P. N. Elrod, Lynn Flewelling, Tanya Huff, Stephen Leigh, Jane Lindskold, Mickey Zucker Reichert, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Josepha Sherman and others; another monthly "issue" of Greenberg's ongoing paperback-format pulp magazine [see above].) *July 2001.*

Hardy, David A. **Hardyware: The Art of David A. Hardy.** Text by



Chris Morgan. Foreword by Stephen Baxter. Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85585-917-3, 128pp, large-format hardcover, cover by Hardy, £20. (Sf art portfolio, first edition; the veteran David Hardy is Britain's

homegrown equivalent of the late Chesley Bonestell, famous for his realistically-conceived spacescapes; this is another well-produced, attractive career summary from Paper Tiger; recommended.) 16th August 2001.

Hawksley, Humphrey. **Dragon Fire**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-39156-9, xvii+430pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Near-future war thriller, first published in the UK, 2000; a fourth novel by a BBC journalist with extensive Asian experience, it opens in the year 2007 and describes a war between India, China and Pakistan which threatens the whole world; the cover gives the title as *Dragonfire*, but from internal evidence it appears the title is intended to be two words.) 10th August 2001.

Hendrix, Howard V. **Empty Cities of the Full Moon**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00844-5, 441pp, hardcover, cover by John Jude Palencar, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; Hendrix's fourth novel, following *Lightpaths* [1997], *Standing Wave* [1998] and *Better Angels* [2000]; like the previous books, it looks to be ideas-rich sf.) August 2001.

Hobb, Robin. **Fool's Errand: The Tawny Man, I**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224726-7, viii+584pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; "Robin Hobb" is a pseudonym of Megan Lindholm; the notes on this proof tell us some interesting things: "Robin Hobb is Voyager's fastest selling author... The Farseer Trilogy has sold over half a million copies in the UK alone"; it seems Ms Lindholm's relaunching of her career really worked; we wonder if the slightly masculine-sounding pseudonym was a factor?; it remains an odd anomaly that although scores of women write Big Commercial Fantasies the very biggest sellers – "in the tradition of Tolkien" – still tend to be male: Eddings, Feist, Jordan, etc; maybe Lindholm has broken that pattern – as, of course, J. K. Rowling has done in the field of humorous fantasy.) 15th October 2001.

Huysmans, J.-K. **Là-Bas: A Journey into the Self**. Translated by Brendan King. Afterword and chronology by Robert Irwin. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-74-7, 329pp, B-format paperback, cover by Aubrey Beardsley, £7.99. (Literary horror novel, first published in France, 1891; the classic novel about satanism and black magic, by the greatest of French "dédadent" writers, Joris-Karl Huysmans [1848-1907]; Dedalus previously reissued a version of the first, expurgated English translation [1924] in 1986 and 1992, but this is a completely new translation which seems to be intended as a definitive replacement.) 26th July 2001.

Kalat, David. **The Strange Case of Dr. Mabuse: A Study of the Twelve Films and Five Novels**. McFarland, ISBN 0-7864-1066-3, x+305pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Illustrated study of the horror-thriller novels and films in the "Mabuse" cycle, created by writer Norbert Jacques [1880-1954] and first committed to celluloid by director Fritz Lang [1890-1976]; first edition; sterling-priced import copies should be available in the UK from Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN; this is a full and fascinating account of an aspect of 1920s German popular culture which is little-known in the English-speaking world; recommended.) No date shown: received in July 2001.

Lindskold, Jane. **Through Wolf's Eyes**. "The beginning of a major fantasy epic of human and animal magic." Tor, ISBN 0-312-87427-8, 590pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; Charles de Lint commends it: "Courtly intrigues that would make Dorothy Dunnett proud shouldn't mix so well with the story of a feral child, but they do, they do.") August 2001.

McAuley, Paul. **Whole Wide World**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-225903-6, 388pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's set a decade or so from now, "two years after the InfoWar"; the blurb describes it as "an outstanding near-future police thriller in the vein of Greg Bear and Michael Marshall Smith"; Paul McAuley's second novel this year, it comes just nine months after his last, *The Secret of Life*.) 3rd September 2001.

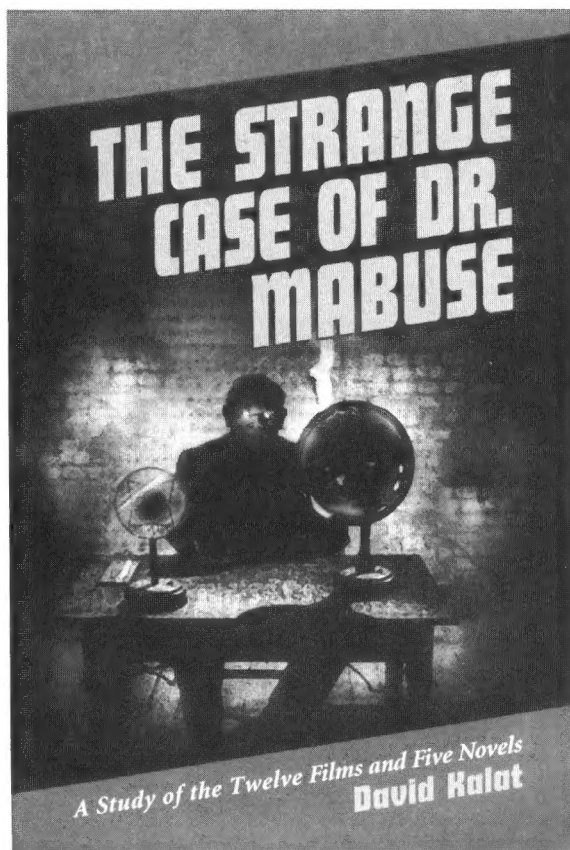
McGarry, Terry. **Illumination**. "A stunning debut from a strong new fantasy voice." Tor, ISBN 0-312-87389-1, 494pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; yet more close-set, long-paged BCF from an unknown author [American, female], this debut comes with pre-publication commendations from both Robert Jordan and, gulp, Gene Wolfe.) August 2001.

McKiernan, Dennis L. **Once Upon a Winter's Night**. Roc, ISBN 0-451-45840-0, xii+383pp, hardcover, cover by Duane O. Myers, \$23.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it's based on the fairy tale "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" which McKiernan first read in Andrew Lang's *The Blue Fairy Book* [1889]; as we said in our listing of a previous McKiernan novel, *Into the Fire* [Roc, 1998], the author is older than one might expect: his brief afterword to the earlier book began, "I was born April 4, 1932... in the depths of the Great Depression," and went on to credit Edmond Hamilton, principal author of the 1940s sf hero-pulp *Captain Future*, as his formative childhood influence; add to that the *Fairy Books* of Andrew Lang, evidently.) July 2001.

McMullen, Sean. **Eyes of the Calculator**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87736-6, 589pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; another big new book from one of the best Australian sf writers; although this proof is unlabelled as such, it appears to be the final volume in McMullen's bibliographically-complex "Greatwinter Trilogy" – sequel to *Souls in the Great Machine* [1999] and *The Miocene Arrow* [2000]; see Paul McAuley's reviews, *Interzone* 146 and 160.) September 2001.

Martin, George R. R. **A Storm of Swords, Two: Blood and Gold. Book Three of A Song of Ice and Fire**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-711955-0, 637pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 2000; the third volume of Martin's ongoing epic was so vast that the publishers have seen fit to split it in two for mass-market paperback reissue – and this is the second of those two parts; the full thing was reviewed, with high praise, by Nick Gevers in *Interzone* 164.) 6th August 2001.

Merritt, A. **The Moon Pool**. Introduction by Robert Silverberg. "Bison Frontiers of Imagination." Bison Books [University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 68588-0255, USA], ISBN 0-8032-8268-0, xiv+287pp, trade paperback, cover by R. W. Boeche, £7.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1919; this is the recent American edition with a UK price and publication date added, distributed in the UK by Combined Academic Publishers Ltd, 15a Lewin's Yard, East St., Chesham, Bucks. HP5 1HQ; Abraham Merritt [1884-1943] was a product of Munsey's *All-Story*, the same pulp magazine that brought us Edgar Rice



Burroughs's Tarzan, Johnston McCulley's Zorro and Max Brand's earliest western heroes – but his writing was in a lush, more imaginative vein than the adventure stories of those other famous pulpsters; via reprinting in Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* [1927], this extravagant lost-race fantasy exerted a considerable influence on the development of American sf.) *September 2001*.

Pierce, Tamora. **Magic Steps: The Circle Opens, 1**. "Point." Scholastic, ISBN 0-439-99260-5, 250pp, A-format paperback, cover by Anne Sharp, £4.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 2001; the beginning of yet another kids' fantasy quartet by this prolific author, it appears to be a sequel to one of her previous series, "The Circle of Magic.") *17th August 2001*.

Price, E. Hoffmann. **Book of the Dead-Friends of Yesteryear: Fictioneers & Others (Memories of the Pulp Fiction Era)**. Edited by Peter Ruber. Introduction by Jack Williamson. Arkham House [PO Box 546, Sauk City, WI 53583, USA], ISBN 0-87054-179-X, xxii+423pp, hardcover, \$32.95. (Memoir by a horror/fantasy writer, first edition; illustrated with 24 pages of photographs [inset], including one of a shirtless Robert E. Howard – now you can see what Conan really looked like!; Edgar Hoffmann Price [1898-1988] was a regular contributor to *Weird Tales* and other pulps, and he had a famously wide acquaintanceship among writers and editors; this volume collects his biographical sketches, mostly previously unpublished, devoted to such individuals as Otis Adelbert Kline, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Seabury Quinn, Henry Kuttner, August Derleth and Edmond Hamilton, among many others; there's also a full Hoffmann Price bibliography [prepared by Virgil Utter] and an index; this looks to be a fascinating book for those devoted to the fantasy pulps of old.) *15th July 2001*.

Pringle, David, ed. **The Ant-Men of Tibet, and Other Stories**. Big Engine [PO Box 185, Abingdon, Oxon. OX14 1GR], ISBN 1-903468-02-7, ix+255pp, trade paperback, cover by SMS, £8.99. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first edition; it contains ten stories reprinted from 1990s issues of *Interzone* – by Stephen Baxter, Chris Beckett, Jayme Lynn Blaschke, Keith Brooke, Eric Brown, Molly Brown, Eugene Byrne, Nicola Caines, Peter T. Garrett and Alastair Reynolds; this is the third book from the new "print-on-demand" publishing house established by Ben Jeapes [see the interview with him in *Interzone* 160]; for ordering information, see his website: www.bigengine.co.uk.) *July 2001*.

Roberts, Adam. **Salt**. Gollancz, ISBN 1-85798-787-X, 248pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 2000; shortlisted for the 2001 Arthur C. Clarke Award, this was the debut novel by a new British academic author whose second, with the rather mimi-

nalist title *On*, came out recently; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 162.) *12th July 2001*.

Robinson, Spider. **The Free Lunch**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86524-4, 254pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the first new book we've seen in quite a while from this Canadian-resident US author who was very popular in the 1970s; it's set in "a fabulous Disney-esque theme park.") *August 2001*.

Rydill, Jessica. **Children of the Shaman**. Orbit, ISBN 1-84149-063-6, 400pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut by a new British writer who "lives in the West Country with her collection of slightly unnerving dolls"; on the front cover, David Gemmell praises it as "a masterful first novel.") *2nd August 2001*.

Segal, Philip, with Gary Russell. **Doctor Who: Regeneration**. "The Story Behind the Revival of a Television Legend." HarperCollins Entertainment, ISBN 0-00-712025-7, vi+162pp, very large-format paperback, £12.99. (Heavily illustrated companion to the making of the 1996 *Doctor Who* TV movie, first published in the UK, 2000; it contains accounts of various versions of the script, plus a blow-by-blow history of the production – and probably contains more than most people want to know about a not-very-memorable film.) *20th August 2001*.

Shwartz, Susan. **Second Chances**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-87342-5, 382pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the proof blurb describes it as "Conrad's *Lord Jim* in space, a riveting hard SF novel" – which is hardly what we would expect of Shwartz, who was previously best known for historical fantasy epics.) *August 2001*.

Stasheff, Christopher. **A Wizard in a Feud**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86674-7, 206pp, hardcover, cover by Peter Peebles, \$22.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; latest in the "Rogue Wizard" sub-series of Stasheff's interminable semi-humorous science-fantasy cycle which began way-back-when with *The Warlock in Spite of Himself* [1969].) *25th July 2001*.

Verne, Jules. **Journey to the Centre of the Earth**. Translated by William Butcher. Introduction by Michael Crichton. Illustrations by Grahame Baker. Folio Society [44 Eagle St., London WC1R 4FS], no ISBN shown, xxviii+231pp, hardcover in a sturdy slipcase, no price shown. (Sf novel, first published in France, 1864; this is a reprint of the Oxford University Press World's Classics translation [1992], slightly revised; it's one of Verne's finest novels, an early classic of sf which everyone should read sooner or later, and Butcher's is said to be a scrupulously accurate translation; Crichton's newly-written introduction is also interesting, so this is an attractive edition to have; it's available as a special offer to non-Folio Society members at £19.95 [presumably that includes postage and packing] – phone 020-7400 4200 if you

wish to order it; on the other hand, some of us are still fond of the proficient Robert Baldick translation [Penguin Books, 1965], which may be slightly less accurate but reads more engagingly than the Butcher.) *July 2001*.

Weaver, Tom. **I Was a Monster Movie Maker: Conversations with 22 SF and Horror Filmmakers**. McFarland, ISBN 0-7864-1000-0, vi+314pp, hardcover, \$38.50. (Illustrated collection of interviews with veteran fantasy-movie personnel; first edition; sterling-priced import copies should be available in the UK from Shelving Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN; this latest in a long series of such volumes from Weaver includes chats with some fairly obscure people; among the not-so-obscure are Faith Domergue [the girl in *This Island Earth*], Maureen O'Sullivan [Jane in *Tarzan and His Mate*] and Ray Walston [in many films but perhaps best remembered as TV's *My Favorite Martian*].) *No date shown: received in July 2001*.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Guardians of the Lost: The Sovereign Stone Trilogy, Book 2**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224748-8, 578pp, hardcover, cover by Martin McKenna, £16.99. (Fantasy game spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 2001; according to a note in the previous volume, this trilogy is based on a world created by the artist Larry Elmore which has also inspired a role-playing game devised by Lester Smith and Don Perrin.) *16th July 2001*.

Wells, H. G. **The Last War: A World Set Free**. Introduction by Greg Bear. "Bison Frontiers of Imagination." Bison Books [University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 68588-0255, USA], ISBN 0-8032-9820-X, xxiv+166pp, trade paperback, cover by R. W. Boeche, £10.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK as *The World Set Free: A Story of Mankind*, 1914; this is the recent American edition with a UK price and publication date added, distributed in the UK by Combined Academic Publishers Ltd, 15a Lewin's Yard, East St., Chesham, Bucks. HP5 1HQ; to the best of our knowledge, it's the first time this comparatively little-known novel of Wells's has been published under the title of *The Last War* [but the publishers offer no explanation for the title change]; although not one of his very best, judged as a piece of dramatic fiction, this is the book in which Wells "fore-told" nuclear war, and it's good to see it in print once more.) *September 2001*.

Woods, Paul A. **The Planet of the Apes Chronicles**. Plexus, ISBN 0-85965-312-9, 174pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Companion to the "Apes" series of sf movies and its spinoffs; first edition; timed to tie in with the release of the new *Planet of the Apes* film directed by Tim Burton, it's blurbed as recounting "the entire history of the Apes saga via a wealth of interviews with cast and crew members of the original films..." and it features "the definitive *Planet of the Apes* timeline.") *18th August 2001*.





The Night Land

We are buying
new fiction set in
the universe of
William Hope
Hodgson's classic
Entropic Romance

Visit our website

We will pay top rates for new fiction (up to 6000 words)
set in the Night Land universe for publication on the site

Visit our website

for new fiction, articles, art, maps, timelines and much more

Visit our website –

<http://home.clara.net/andywrobertson/nightmap.html>

Picture copyright © Stephen E Fabian